

= Who Wants to Be a Millionaire ( U.S. game show ) =

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire ( often informally called Millionaire ) is an American television game show based on the same @-@ titled British program and developed for the United States by Michael Davies . The show features a quiz competition in which contestants attempt to win a top prize of U.S. \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 by answering a series of multiple @-@ choice questions of increasing difficulty ( although , for a time , most of the questions were of random difficulty ) . The program has endured as one of the longest @-@ running and most successful international variants in the Who Wants to Be a Millionaire ? franchise .

The original U.S. version aired on ABC from August 16 , 1999 to June 27 , 2002 , and was hosted by Regis Philbin . The daily syndicated version of the show began airing on September 16 , 2002 , and was hosted for eleven seasons by Meredith Vieira until May 31 , 2013 . Later hosts included Cedric the Entertainer in the 2013 ? 14 season , Terry Crews in the following season ( 2014 ? 15 ) , and Chris Harrison , who began hosting on September 14 , 2015 .

As the first U.S. network game show to offer a million @-@ dollar top prize , the show made television history by becoming one of the highest @-@ rated game shows in the history of American television . The U.S. Millionaire has won seven Daytime Emmy Awards , and TV Guide ranked it # 6 in its 2013 list of the 60 greatest game shows of all time .

= = Gameplay = =

= = = Core rules = = =

At its core , the game is a quiz competition in which the goal is to correctly answer a series of fourteen ( originally fifteen ) consecutive multiple @-@ choice questions . The questions are of increasing difficulty , except in the 2010 ? 15 format overhaul , where the contestants were faced with fourteen questions of random difficulty , distributed into two rounds . Each question is worth a specified amount of money ; the amounts are cumulative in the first round , but not in the second . If the contestant gives a wrong answer to any question , their game is over and their winnings are reduced to \$ 1 @,@ 000 for tier @-@ one questions , \$ 5 @,@ 000 for tier @-@ two questions , and \$ 50 @,@ 000 for tier @-@ three questions . However , the contestant has the option of " walking away " without giving an answer after being presented with a question , in which case the game ends and the contestant is guaranteed to walk away with all the money they have previously received . With the exception of the shuffle format , upon correctly answering questions five and ten , contestants are guaranteed at least the amount of prize money associated with that level . If the contestant gives an incorrect answer , their winnings drop down to the last milestone achieved . Since 2015 , if the contestant answers a question incorrectly before reaching question five , he or she leaves with \$ 1 @,@ 000 . Prior to the shuffle format , a contestant left with nothing if he or she answered a question incorrectly before reaching the first milestone . In the shuffle format era , contestants who incorrectly answered a question had their winnings reduced to \$ 1 @,@ 000 in round one and \$ 25 @,@ 000 in round two .

= = = Format history = = =

On the ABC versions , ten contestants competed in a preliminary " Fastest Finger " round for the right to play the main game on each episode . The contestants were presented with a question and a list of four answers which needed to be put in a specific order . Using keys on their podiums , each of the contestants attempted to enter the correct order in the shortest amount of time , with a maximum time limit of 20 seconds . If the main game ended and there was still time available for another game , the remaining contestants played another Fastest Finger round for a chance to play the main game . In the event of a tie between two or more contestants , those contestants played an additional Fastest Finger question to break the tie . If all contestants answered the question

incorrectly , the round was repeated with another question . Fastest Finger was eliminated from the gameplay when the syndicated version premiered in 2002 .

From 2008 to 2010 , time limits were used for each question . Contestants were given up to 15 seconds each for questions one through five , 30 seconds each for questions six through ten , and 45 seconds each for questions eleven through fourteen . Unused time was banked , and if the contestant reached question fifteen , he or she was given 45 seconds plus however much time that was previously banked . If the clock reached zero before a contestant could provide a final answer , the contestant was forced to walk away with the winnings they had at that point . During the clock format era , a " Millionaire Menu " was introduced , in which categories are revealed for each question at the beginning of the game , and are made visible to the contestant for their future reference . Some prize levels also changed at the start of season eight . Most of the episodes in season eight ( from the " Million Dollar Tournament of Ten " onward ) featured special " Celebrity Questions " that were mid @-@ level in monetary value , and were provided by notable individuals whose identities were not revealed until the contestant reached their special questions .

When the ninth syndicated season began on September 13 , 2010 , the format was overhauled . Ten questions were asked in round one , each assigned one of ten different money amounts which were randomized at the beginning of the game ; in this case , the difficulty of the questions was not tied to the dollar value . The dollar values for each question remained hidden until a contestant either provided a correct answer or chose to " jump " the question . The value of each question answered correctly was added to the contestant 's bank , for a maximum total of \$ 68 @,@ 600 . A contestant who completed the round successfully could walk at any subsequent point with all the money in their bank , or could walk without completing the round with half that amount ( e.g. , a contestant who banked \$ 30 @,@ 000 would leave with \$ 15 @,@ 000 ) . After completing round one , the contestant moved on to a second round of gameplay ( the " Classic Millionaire " round ) , in which four non @-@ categorized questions were played for set non @-@ cumulative values and a correct answer augmented the contestant 's winnings to that point , as in the older formats . The shuffle format changes , including the randomization and double @-@ round distribution of questions , were reverted for the fourteenth syndicated season .

From 2011 to 2014 , certain weeks of the show were designated as " Double Your Money " weeks . In those , a certain question in round one was designated the " Double Money Question . " When a contestant answered such a question correctly , the monetary value behind the question was doubled and added to his or her bank , giving him or her the possibility of adding up to a maximum of \$ 50 @,@ 000 to his or her bank on a single question ; under these special rules , it was possible for a contestant to finish round one with a maximum total of \$ 93 @,@ 600 in their bank . However , when a contestant " jumped " the question , they forfeited the doubled money .

In the event that a contestant leaves and very little time remains , a randomly selected audience member is given one chance to win \$ 1 @,@ 000 by answering the next question intended for the previous contestant ( or \$ 2 @,@ 000 if the next question was on a Double Money episode ) . Regardless of the outcome , the audience member receives a special prize . In seasons nine and ten , the prize was a copy of the Millionaire video game ; as of season eleven , audience members now receive 20 free playings for a Facebook game based on the show 's format . In season thirteen , which gave this game the name " Thousandaire " , the question the audience player faced did not come from the previous player 's stack , but was instead a separate question . Season thirteen also introduced two additional audience games : " Team Millionaire " , where two audience members are both presented with a single question and lock in their individual answers separately for the chance to win \$ 500 and a bonus question with which they can double their money ; and " Fastest Feet " , a variation of Fastest Finger which four audience members play for the chance to split \$ 1 @,@ 000 .

= = = Payout structure = = =

For the first five years of the U.S. Millionaire 's existence , the payout structure was as follows : first going from \$ 100 to \$ 300 in increments of \$ 100 , then from \$ 500 to \$ 64 @,@ 000 with the dollar value for each new question being double that of the one before it , and finally from \$ 125 @,@ 000

to \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 with the dollar values doubling for each new question . At the start of the third syndicated season the values for questions ten through twelve were changed from \$ 32 @, @ 000 , \$ 64 @, @ 000 , and \$ 125 @, @ 000 to \$ 25 @, @ 000 , \$ 50 @, @ 000 , and \$ 100 @, @ 000 respectively . The 2004 payout structure endured until the eighth syndicated season , when after the ninth contestant from the 2009 primetime revival played , a new payout structure was implemented in which the dollar values first went from \$ 500 to \$ 2 @, @ 000 with the dollar value of each new question being double that of the previous one , then to \$ 3 @, @ 000 , then from \$ 5 @, @ 000 to \$ 15 @, @ 000 in increments of \$ 2 @, @ 500 ; the dollar values of questions ten through fifteen remained unchanged . In the shuffle format era , the ten questions in round one had random values which included \$ 100 , \$ 500 , \$ 1 @, @ 000 , \$ 2 @, @ 000 , \$ 3 @, @ 000 , \$ 5 @, @ 000 , \$ 7 @, @ 000 , \$ 10 @, @ 000 , \$ 15 @, @ 000 , and \$ 25 @, @ 000 ; the final four questions , in round two , retained their 2004 values . For the 2015 ? 16 season , the first five questions follow the payout structure used from 2009 to 2010 , while the dollar value of each new question for the next five questions is \$ 7 @, @ 000 , \$ 10 @, @ 000 , \$ 20 @, @ 000 , \$ 30 @, @ 000 and \$ 50 @, @ 000 ; the money values for the last four questions remain unchanged . The second safe haven is \$ 50 @, @ 000 at question 10 , with the first one still \$ 5 @, @ 000 .

The \$ 500 @, @ 000 and \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 prizes were initially lump @-@ sum payments , but were changed to annuities in September 2002 when the series moved to syndication . Contestants winning either of these prizes receive \$ 250 @, @ 000 thirty days after their show broadcasts and the remainder paid in equal annual payments . The \$ 500 @, @ 000 prize consists of \$ 25 @, @ 000 per year for 10 years , while the \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 prize consists of \$ 37 @, @ 500 per year for 20 years .

== Lifelines ==

Contestants are given a series of lifelines to aid them with difficult questions . They can use as many lifelines as desired per question , but each lifeline can only be used once per game . Three lifelines are available from the start of the game . Depending on the format of the show , additional lifelines may become available after the contestant correctly answers the fifth or tenth question . In the clock format , usage of lifelines temporarily paused the clock while the lifelines were played .

The show 's original three lifelines were " 50 : 50 " , in which the computer eliminates two of the incorrect answers ; " Phone @-@ a @-@ Friend " , which allowed the contestant to make a 30 @-@ second call to one of a number of friends ( who provided their phone numbers in advance ) and read them the question and answer choices , after which the friend provided input ; and " Ask the Audience " , in which audience members use touch pads to designate what they believe the correct answer to be , after which the percentage of the audience choosing each specific option is displayed to the contestant . 50 : 50 was eliminated at the end of the show 's sixth syndicated season , only to be restored in season fourteen . Phone @-@ a @-@ Friend was removed on the episode aired January 11 , 2010 , after it was determined that there was an increasing trend of contestants ' friends using search engines and other Internet resources , unfairly privileging individuals who had computer access over those who did not , and that it was contrary to the original intent of the lifeline where friends were supposed to provide assistance based on what they already knew . From 2004 to 2008 , there was a fourth lifeline called " Switch the Question " , earned upon answering question ten , in which the computer replaced , at the contestant 's request , one question with another of the same monetary value ; however , any lifelines used on the original question were not reinstated for the new question . Switch the Question returned as " Cut the Question " on a special week of shows with child contestants aired in 2014 .

During the Super Millionaire spin @-@ off , two new lifelines were introduced : " Double Dip " , which allowed the contestant to make two guesses at a question , but required them to play out the question , forbidding them to walk away or use any further lifelines ; and " Three Wise Men " , in which the contestant was allowed to ask a sequestered panel of three people chosen by the producers , appearing via face @-@ to @-@ face audio and video feeds , which answer they believed was correct , within a time limit of 30 seconds . When the clock format was implemented ,

Double Dip replaced 50 : 50 , and the show introduced a new lifeline called " Ask the Expert " , which was like Three Wise Men but had one person ( usually a celebrity or a former Millionaire contestant ) functioning as an expert instead of a panel of three people , lacked the time limit of its predecessor , and allowed the contestant and expert to discuss the question . Ask the Expert was originally available after the fifth question , but was moved to the beginning of the game after Phone @-@ a @-@ Friend was removed .

The show 's lifelines sometimes used corporate sponsorship . The Phone @-@ a @-@ Friend lifeline was sponsored by the original AT & T throughout the run of the ABC primetime show and in the first season of the syndicated version , then by the current AT & T for the 2009 primetime episodes . From 2004 to 2006 , Ask the Audience was sponsored by AOL , which allowed users of its Instant Messenger to add the screen name MillionaireIM to their buddy list and receive an instant message with the question and the four possible answers , to which the users replied with their choices . In addition , the Ask the Expert lifeline was sponsored by Skype for its live audio and video feeds .

During the shuffle format era , the show introduced a new lifeline , " Jump the Question " , which was able to be used twice in a single game for seasons nine through twelve . At any point prior to selecting a final answer , a contestant could use Jump the Question to skip the current question and move on to the next one , thus reducing the number of questions they had to correctly answer . However , if the contestant used Jump the Question , they did not gain any money from the question they chose to skip ( for example , a contestant would not gain the typical \$ 100 @,@ 000 if they jumped to the \$ 250 @,@ 000 question ) . This lifeline could not be used on the \$ 1 million question , since it is the final question in the game . The " Plus One " lifeline , introduced in season thirteen , allows a contestant to bring a companion with him or her to the podium for help in answering a question . The introduction of this lifeline reduced the number of Jump the Question lifelines available from two to one . On occasional specially designated weeks , starting with a Halloween @-@ themed week that aired from October 29 to November 2 , 2012 , the shuffle format used a special lifeline called " Crystal Ball " , which allows the contestant to see the money value of a round one question prior to giving an answer . Jump the Question was removed at the end of the show 's thirteenth syndicated season . For the show 's fourteenth season , during a special week of college shows , players got another lifeline called " Extra Help " , played similarly to " Plus One " and allowing for another companion to help the player ; however , it could only be used after " Plus One " was used .

= = = Top prize winners = = =

The first contestant to correctly answer all 15 questions and win the top prize of \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 was John Carpenter , on the episode aired November 19 , 1999 . In 2000 , the million dollar top prize was awarded five times : to Dan Blonsky on the episode aired January 18 , to Joe Trela on March 23 , to Bob House on June 13 , to Kim Hunt on July 6 , and to David Goodman on July 11 .

In January 2001 , when no contestant had won \$ 1 million in any show that aired over a period of five months , the top prize was then changed from a flat \$ 1 million to an accumulating jackpot that increased by \$ 10 @,@ 000 for each episode where the top prize was not won . On April 10 , 2001 , Kevin Olmstead correctly answered the final question and won \$ 2 @,@ 180 @,@ 000 , making him the biggest winner in television history at the time . The top prize for correctly answering the final question returned to \$ 1 million following Olmstead 's win and has remained unchanged since ; just five days after Olmstead 's win , the standard \$ 1 million prize was awarded to Bernie Cullen . The last top prize winner on the original network version was Ed Toutant , on the episode aired September 7 , 2001 ; he had previously appeared on the episode aired January 31 , 2001 , where he was ruled to have answered his \$ 16 @,@ 000 question incorrectly , but when it was discovered that there was a mistake in that question , Toutant was invited back and won a \$ 1 @.@ 86 million jackpot . On the Super Millionaire spin @-@ off , Robert Essig won \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 after answering the twelfth question and then walked away , not reaching the final question for \$ 10 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 .

On the syndicated version 's first season , two contestants correctly answered all 15 questions and won the top prize of \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 : Kevin Smith on February 18 , 2003 , and Nancy Christy on May 8 of the same year . During the Million Dollar Tournament of Ten which aired in November 2009 , Sam Murray , who had previously supplied correct responses for eleven questions , risked his winnings on a special \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 question ; he was the only contestant to answer his question correctly .

= = Personnel = =

= = = Hosts = = =

The original network version of the U.S. Millionaire and the subsequent primetime specials were hosted by Regis Philbin . When the syndicated version was being developed , the production team felt that it was not feasible for Philbin to continue hosting , as the show recorded four episodes in a single day , and that the team was looking for qualities in a new host : it had to be somebody who would love the contestants and be willing to root for them . Rosie O 'Donnell was initially offered a hosting position on this new edition , but declined the opportunity almost immediately . Eventually Meredith Vieira , who had previously competed in a celebrity charity event on the original network version , was named host of the new syndicated edition .

ABC originally offered Vieira hosting duties on the syndicated Millionaire to sweeten one of her re @-@ negotiations for the network 's daytime talk show The View , which she was moderating at the time . When the show was honored by GSN on its Gameshow Hall of Fame special , Vieira herself further explained her motivation for hosting the syndicated version as follows :

I did the show because I fell in love with the show , and really , first and foremost , as a parent , [ I feel that ] there aren 't that many shows on television that you can watch as a family . And when Michael Davies approached me and said , " Would you be interested in hosting the syndicated version ? " , I said , " Just point me toward the contract ! I am so there ! "

From 2007 to 2011 , when Vieira was concurrently working as a co @-@ host of Today , guest hosts appeared in the second half of each season of the syndicated version . Guest hosts who filled in for Vieira included Philbin , Al Roker , Tom Bergeron , Tim Vincent , Dave Price , Billy Bush , Leeza Gibbons , Cat Deeley , Samantha Harris , Shaun Robinson , Steve Harvey , John Henson , Sherri Shepherd , Tim Gunn , and D. L. Hughley .

On January 10 , 2013 , Vieira announced that after eleven seasons with the syndicated Millionaire , she would be leaving the show as part of an effort to focus on other projects in her career . She finalized taping of her last episodes with the show in November 2012 . Her successor as host of the syndicated Millionaire , Cedric the Entertainer , was introduced to the show when season twelve premiered on September 2 , 2013 . On April 30 , 2014 , Deadline announced that Cedric had decided to leave the show in order to lighten his workload , resulting in him being succeeded by Terry Crews for the 2014 ? 2015 season . Crews was succeeded by Chris Harrison , host of The Bachelor and its spin @-@ offs , when season 14 premiered on September 14 , 2015 .

= = = Production staff = = =

The original executive producers of the U.S. Millionaire were British television producers Michael Davies and Paul Smith , the latter of whom undertook the responsibility of licensing Millionaire to American airwaves as part of his effort to transform the UK program into a global franchise . Smith served until 2007 and Davies until 2010 ; additionally , Leigh Hampton ( previously co @-@ executive producer in the later days of the network version and in the syndicated version 's first two seasons ) served as an executive producer from 2004 to 2010 . Rich Sirop , who was previously a supervising producer , became the executive producer in 2010 and held that position until 2014 , when he left Millionaire to hold the same position with Vieira 's newly launched syndicated talk show , and was replaced by James Rowley . Vincent Rubino , who had previously been the syndicated

Millionaire 's supervising producer for its first two seasons , served as that version 's co @-@ executive producer for the 2004 ? 05 season , after which he was succeeded by Vieira herself , who continued to hold the title until her departure in 2013 ( sharing her position with Sirop for the 2009 ? 10 season ) .

Producers of the network version included Hampton , Rubino , Leslie Fuller , Nikki Webber , and Terrence McDonnell . For its first two seasons the syndicated version had Deirdre Cossman for its managing producer , then Dennis F. McMahon became producer for the next two seasons ( joined by Dominique Bruballa as his line producer ) , after which Jennifer Weeks produced the next four seasons of syndicated Millionaire shows , initially accompanied by Amanda Zucker as her line producer , but later joined for the 2008 ? 09 season by Tommy Cody ( who became sole producer in the 2009 ? 10 season ) . The first 65 shuffle format episodes were produced by McPaul Smith , and as of 2011 , the title of producer is held by Bryan Lasseter . The network version had Ann Miller and Tiffany Trigg for its supervising producers ; they were joined by Wendy Roth in the first two seasons , and by Michael Binkow in the third and final season . After Rubino 's promotion to co @-@ executive producer , the syndicated version 's later supervising producers included Sirop ( 2004 ? 09 ) , Geena Gintzig ( 2009 ? 10 ) , Brent Burnette ( 2010 ? 12 ) , Geoff Rosen ( 2012 ? 14 ) , and Liz Harris ( 2014 ? 16 ) .

The original network version of Millionaire was directed by Mark Gentile , who later served as the syndicated version 's consulting producer for its first two seasons , and then as the director of Duel , which ran on ABC from December 2007 to July 2008 . The syndicated version was directed by Matthew Cohen from 2002 to 2010 , by Rob George from 2010 to 2013 , and by Brian McAloon in the 2013 ? 14 season . Former Price Is Right director Rich DiPirro became Millionaire 's director in 2014 .

= = Production = =

The U.S. version of Millionaire is a co @-@ production of 2waytraffic , a division of Sony Pictures Entertainment , and Valleycrest Productions , a division of The Walt Disney Company . 2waytraffic purchased Millionaire 's original production company Celador in 2008 , while Valleycrest has produced the series since its beginning , and holds the copyright on all U.S. Millionaire episodes to date . The show is distributed by Valleycrest 's corporate sibling Disney ? ABC Domestic Television ( previously known as Buena Vista Television ) .

The U.S. Millionaire was taped at ABC 's Television Center East studio on the Upper West Side of Manhattan in New York from 1999 to 2012 . Tapings were moved to NEP Broadcasting 's Metropolis Studios in East Harlem in 2013 , and production moved to studios located in Stamford , Connecticut the following year . Episodes of the syndicated version are produced from June to December . The show originally taped four episodes in a single day , but that number has since been changed to five .

= = = Origins = = =

When the U.S. version of Millionaire was first conceived in 1998 , Michael Davies was a young television producer who was serving as the head of ABC 's little @-@ noticed reality programming division ( at a time when reality television had not yet become a phenomenon in America ) . At that time , ABC was lingering in third place in the ratings indexes among U.S. broadcast networks , and was on the verge of losing its status as one of the " Big Three " networks . Meanwhile , the popularity of game shows was at an all @-@ time nadir , as with the exception of The Price Is Right , the genre was absent from networks ' daytime lineups at that point . Having earlier created Debt for Lifetime Television and participated with Al Burton and Donnie Brainard in the creation of Win Ben Stein 's Money for Comedy Central , Davies decided to create a primetime game show that would save the network from collapse and revive interest in game shows .

Davies originally considered reviving CBS 's long @-@ lost quiz show The \$ 64 @, @ 000 Question for a new era , with a new home on ABC . However , this effort 's development was limited as when

the producer heard that the British Millionaire was about to make its debut , he got his friends and family members in the UK to record the show , and subsequently ended up receiving about eight FedEx packages from different family members , each containing a copy of Millionaire 's first episode . Davies was so captivated by everything that he had seen and heard , from host Chris Tarrant 's intimate involvement with the contestant to the show 's lighting system and music tracks , that he chose to abandon his work on the \$ 64 @, @ 000 Question revival in favor of introducing Millionaire to American airwaves , convinced that it would become extraordinarily popular .

When Davies presented his ideas for the U.S. Millionaire to ABC , the network 's executives initially rejected them , so he resigned his position there and became an independent producer . Determined to bring his idea for the show to fruition , Davies decided that he was betting his whole career on Millionaire 's production , and the first move that he made was planning to attach a celebrity host to the show . Along with Philbin , a number of other popular television personalities were considered for hosting positions on the U.S. Millionaire during its development , including Peter Jennings , Bob Costas , Phil Donahue , and Montel Williams , but among those considered , it was Philbin who wanted the job the most , and when he saw an episode of the British Millionaire and was blown away by his content , Davies and his team ultimately settled on having him host the American show . When Davies approached ABC again after having hired Philbin , the network finally agreed to accept the U.S. Millionaire . With production now ready to begin , the team had only five months to finish developing the show and get it launched , with Davies demanding perfection in every element of Millionaire 's production .

= = = Audition process = = =

With few exceptions , any legal resident of the United States who is 18 years of age or older has the potential of becoming a contestant through Millionaire 's audition process . Those ineligible include employees , immediate family or household members , and close acquaintances of SPE , Disney , or any of their respective affiliates or subsidiaries ; television stations that broadcast the syndicated version ; or any advertising agency or other firm or entity engaged in the production , administration , or judging of the show . Also ineligible are current candidates for political office and individuals who have appeared on a different game show outside of cable that has been broadcast within the past year , is intended to be broadcast within the next year , or played the main game on any of the U.S. versions of Millionaire itself .

Potential contestants of the original primetime version had to compete in a telephone contest which had them dial a toll @-@ free number and answer three questions by putting objects or events in order . Callers had ten seconds to enter the order on a keypad , with any incorrect answer ending the game / call . The 10 @, @ 000 to 20 @, @ 000 candidates who answered all three questions correctly were selected into a random drawing in which approximately 300 contestants competed for ten spots on the show using the same phone quiz method . Accommodations for contestants outside the New York City area included round trip airfare ( or other transportation ) and hotel accommodations .

The syndicated version 's potential contestants , depending on tryouts , are required to pass an electronically scored test comprising a set of thirty questions which must be answered within a 10 @-@ minute time limit . Contestants who fail the test are eliminated , while those who pass are interviewed for an audition by the production staff , and those who impress the staff the most are then notified by postal mail that they have been placed into a pool for possible selection as contestants . At the producers ' discretion , contestants from said pool are selected to appear on actual episodes of the syndicated program ; these contestants are given a phone call from staff and asked to confirm the information on their initial application form and verify that they meet all eligibility requirements . Afterwards , they are given a date to travel to the show 's taping facilities to participate in a scheduled episode of the show . Unlike its ABC counterpart , the syndicated version does not offer transportation or hotel accommodations to contestants at the production company 's expense ; that version 's contestants are instead required to provide transportation and accommodations of their own .

The syndicated Millionaire also conducts open casting calls in various locations across the United States to search for potential contestants . These are held in late spring or early summer , with all dates and locations posted on the show 's official website . The producers make no guarantee on how many applicants will be tested at each particular venue ; however , the show will not test any more than 2 @, @ 500 individuals per audition day .

In cases when the show features themed episodes with two people playing as a team , auditions for these episodes ' contestants are announced on the show 's website . Both members of the team must pass the written test and the audition interview successfully in order to be considered for selection . If only one member of the team passes , he or she is placed into the contestant pool alone and must continue the audition process as an individual in order to proceed .

= = = Music = = =

Originally , the U.S. Millionaire carried over the musical score from the British version , composed by father @-@ and @-@ son duo Keith and Matthew Strachan . Unlike older game show musical scores , Millionaire 's musical score was created to feature music playing almost throughout the entire show . The Strachans ' main Millionaire theme song took some inspiration from the " Mars " movement of Gustav Holst 's The Planets , and their question cues from the \$ 2 @, @ 000 to the \$ 32 @, @ 000 / \$ 25 @, @ 000 level , and then from the \$ 64 @, @ 000 / \$ 50 @, @ 000 level onwards , took the pitch up a semitone for each subsequent question , in order to increase tension as the contestant progressed through the game . On GSN 's Gameshow Hall of Fame special , the narrator described the Strachan tracks as " mimicking the sound of a beating heart , " and stated that as the contestant worked their way up the money ladder , the music was " perfectly in tune with their ever @-@ increasing pulse . "

The original Millionaire musical score holds the distinction of being the only game show soundtrack to be acknowledged by the American Society of Composers , Authors and Publishers , as the Strachans were honored with numerous ASCAP awards for their work , the earliest of them awarded in 2000 . The original music cues were given minor rearrangements for the clock format in 2008 ; for example , the question cues were synced to the " ticking " sounds of the game clock . Even later , the Strachan score was removed from the U.S. version altogether for the introduction of the shuffle format in 2010 , in favor of a new musical score with cues written by Jeff Lippencott and Mark T. Williams , co @-@ founders of the Los Angeles @-@ based company Ah2 Music .

= = = Set = = =

The U.S. Millionaire 's basic set is a direct adaptation of the British version 's set design , which was conceived by Andy Walmsley . Paul Smith 's original licensing agreement for the U.S. Millionaire required that the show 's set design , along with all other elements of the show 's on @-@ air presentation ( musical score , lighting system , host 's wardrobe , etc . ) , adhere faithfully to the way in which they were presented in the British version ; this same licensing agreement applied to all other international versions of the show , making Walmsley 's Millionaire set design the most reproduced scenic design in television history . The original version of the U.S. Millionaire 's set cost \$ 200 @, @ 000 to construct . The U.S. Millionaire 's production design is handled by George Allison , whose predecessors have included David Weller and Jim Fenhagen .

Unlike older game shows whose sets are or were designed to make the contestant ( s ) feel at ease , Millionaire 's set was designed to make the contestant feel uncomfortable , so that the program feels more like a movie thriller than a typical quiz show . The floor is made of Plexiglas beneath which lies a huge dish covered in mirror paper . Before the shuffle format was implemented in 2010 , the main game had the contestant and host sit in chairs in the center of the stage , known as " Hot Seats " ; these measured 3 feet ( 0 @. @ 91 m ) high , were modeled after chairs typically found in hair salons , and each seat featured a computer monitor directly facing it to display questions and other pertinent information . Shortly after the shuffle format was introduced to Millionaire , Vieira stated in an interview with her Millionaire predecessor on his morning talk show that the Hot Seat



was removed because it was decided that the seat , which was originally intended to make the contestant feel nervous , actually ended up having contestants feel so comfortable in it that it did not service the production team any longer .

The lighting system is programmed to darken the set as the contestant progresses further into the game . There are also spotlights situated at the bottom of the set area that zoom down on the contestant when they answer a major question ; to increase the visibility of the light beams emitted by such spotlights , oil is vaporized , creating a haze effect . Media scholar Dr. Robert Thompson , a professor at Syracuse University , stated that the show 's lighting system made the contestant feel as though they were outside of prison when an escape was in progress .

When the shuffle format was introduced , the Hot Seats and corresponding monitors were replaced with a single podium , and as a result , the contestant and host stand throughout the game and are also able to walk around the stage . Also , two video screens were installed ? one that displays the current question in play , and another that displays the contestant 's cumulative total and progress during the game . In September 2012 , the redesigned set was improved with a modernized look and feel , in order to take into account the show 's transition to high @-@ definition broadcasting , which had just come about the previous year . The two video screens were replaced with two larger ones , having twice as many projectors as the previous screens had ; the previous contestant podium was replaced with a new one ; and light @-@ emitting diode ( LED ) technology was integrated into the lighting system to give the lights more vivid colors and the set and gameplay experience a more intimate feel .

= = Broadcast history = =

= = = ABC = = =

The U.S. version of Millionaire was launched by ABC as a half @-@ hour primetime program on August 16 , 1999 . When it premiered , it became the first U.S. network game show to offer a million @-@ dollar top prize to contestants . After airing thirteen episodes and reaching an audience of 15 million viewers by the end of the show 's first week on the air , the program expanded to an hour @-@ long format when it returned in November . The series , of which episodes were originally shown only a day after their initial taping , was promoted to regular status on January 18 , 2000 and , at the height of its popularity , was airing on ABC five nights a week . The show was so popular during its original primetime run that rival networks created or re @-@ incarnated game shows of their own ( e.g. , Greed , Twenty One , etc . ) , as well as importing various game shows of British and Australian origin to America ( such as Winning Lines , Weakest Link , and It 's Your Chance of a Lifetime ) .

The nighttime version initially drew in up to 30 million viewers a day three times a week , an unheard @-@ of number in modern network television . In the 1999 ? 2000 season , it averaged # 1 in the ratings against all other television shows , with 28 @,@ 848 @,@ 000 viewers . In the next season ( 2000 ? 01 ) , three nights out of the five weekly episodes placed in the top 10 . However , the show 's ratings began to fall during the 2000 ? 01 season , so that at the start of the 2001 ? 02 season , the ratings were only a fraction of what they had been one year before , and by season 's end , the show was no longer even ranked among the top 20 . ABC 's reliance on the show 's popularity led the network to fall quickly from its former spot as the nation 's most watched network .

As ABC 's overexposure of the primetime Millionaire led the public to tire of the show , there was speculation that the show would not survive beyond the 2001 ? 02 season . The staff planned on switching it to a format that would emphasize comedy more than the game and feature a host other than Philbin , but in the end , the primetime show was canceled , with its final episode airing on June 27 , 2002 .

= = = Syndication = = =

In 2001 , Millionaire producers began work on a half @-@ hour daily syndicated version of the show , with the idea being that it would serve as an accompaniment to the network series which was still in production . ABC 's cancellation of the network Millionaire ended that idea ; however , the syndicated Millionaire still had enough interest to be greenlit and BVT sold the series to local stations for the 2002 ? 03 season . The syndicated series nearly met the same fate as its predecessor , however , due in part to worries that stemmed from a decision made by one of its affiliates .

In the New York media market , BVT sold the syndicated Millionaire to CBS 's flagship station , WCBS @-@ TV . In the season that had passed , WCBS ' mid @-@ afternoon schedule included the syndicated edition of NBC 's Weakest Link , which aired at 4 pm from its January 2002 premiere . Joining Millionaire as a new syndicated series was a spinoff of The Oprah Winfrey Show hosted by Dr. Phil McGraw . WCBS picked up both series for 2002 ? 03 , with Dr. Phil serving as lead @-@ in for the syndicated Millionaire , which was plugged into the time slot that Weakest Link had been occupying .

At mid @-@ season , WCBS announced that for the 2003 ? 04 season it had acquired the broadcast rights to The People 's Court after WNBC , which had been airing the revived series since its 1997 debut , dropped it from its lineup . WCBS announced plans to move The People 's Court into the time slot that was occupied by Millionaire and the still @-@ airing 4 : 30 pm local newscast once it joined the station 's lineup in September 2003 . This led to speculation that the syndicated Millionaire would not be returning for a second season , and BVT 's concerns over losing its New York affiliate were compounded by the fact that there were not many time slots available for the show in New York outside of the undesirable late @-@ night slots that syndicators try to avoid .

In June 2003 , a shakeup at one of BVT 's corporate siblings provided the series with an opening . ABC announced that it would be returning the 12 : 30 pm network time slot to its affiliates in October of that year following the cancellation of the soap opera Port Charles . ABC 's flagship , WABC @-@ TV , was thus in need of a program to fill the slot and BVT went to them asking if the station would pick up Millionaire . WABC agreed to do this and when the new season launched that fall , the station began airing Millionaire at 12 : 30 pm . Millionaire continued to air on WABC in the afternoon until the end of the 2014 ? 15 season , when it acquired the broadcast rights to FABLife for the 2015 ? 16 season . To make room for FABLife , the afternoon airing of Millionaire was moved to independent station WLNY @-@ TV .

According to e @-@ mails released in the Sony Pictures Entertainment hack , Millionaire narrowly avoided cancellation after the 2014 ? 15 season . The show 's declining ratings prompted DADT to demand a dramatically reduced licensing fee for renewal , which SPE was hesitant to accept . The series was nonetheless renewed for the 2015 ? 16 season , with various cuts to the show 's production budget and a return to the original format ( but with only 14 questions ) . Had the show not been renewed , SPE would have placed the show on extended hiatus for three years , reclaimed full rights to the show ( without the innovations and format added in the syndicated run , to which DADT owns intellectual property rights ) , and shopped the revived show to another network or syndicator .

== GSN ==

GSN acquired the rerun rights to the U.S. Millionaire in August 2003 . The network initially aired only episodes from the three seasons of the original prime @-@ time run ; however , additional episodes were later added . These included the Super Millionaire spin @-@ off , which aired on GSN from May 2005 to January 2007 , and the first two seasons of the syndicated version , which began airing on November 10 , 2008 .

== Special editions ==

Various special editions and tournaments have been conducted which feature celebrities playing the game and donating winnings to charities of their choice . During celebrity editions on the original

ABC version , contestants were allowed to receive help from their fellow contestants during the first ten questions . The most successful celebrity contestants throughout the show 's run have included Drew Carey , Rosie O 'Donnell , Norm MacDonald , and Chip Esten , all of whom won \$ 500 @, @ 000 for their respective charities . The episode featuring O 'Donnell 's \$ 500 @, @ 000 win averaged 36 @. @ 1 million viewers , the highest number for a single episode of the show .

There have also been special weeks featuring two or three family members or couples competing as a team , a " Champions Edition " where former big winners returned and split their winnings with their favorite charities , a " Zero Dollar Winner Edition " featuring contestants who previously missed one of the first @-@ tier questions and left with nothing , and a " Tax @-@ Free Edition " in which H & R Block calculated the taxes of winnings to allow contestants to earn stated winnings after taxes , and various theme weeks featuring college students , teachers , brides @-@ to @-@ be , etc. as contestants . Additionally , the syndicated version once featured an annual " Walk In & Win Week " with contestants who were randomly selected from the audience without having to take the audition test .

Special weeks have also included shows featuring questions concerning specific topics , such as professional football , celebrity gossip , movies , and pop culture . During a week of episodes in November 2007 , to celebrate the 1,000th episode of the syndicated Millionaire , all contestants that week started with \$ 1 @, @ 000 so that they could not leave empty @-@ handed , and only had to answer ten questions to win \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 . During that week , twenty home viewers per day also won \$ 1 @, @ 000 each .

= = = Who Wants to Be a Super Millionaire = = =

In 2004 , Philbin returned to host 12 episodes of a spin @-@ off program titled Who Wants to Be a Super Millionaire in which contestants could potentially win \$ 10 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 . ABC aired five episodes of this spin @-@ off during the week of February 22 , 2004 , and an additional seven episodes later that year in May . As usual , the contestants were to answer a series of 15 multiple choice questions of increasing difficulty , but the dollar values were substantially increased . The payout structure of Super Millionaire was as follows : first going from \$ 1 @, @ 000 to \$ 5 @, @ 000 in increments of \$ 1 @, @ 000 ; then from \$ 10 @, @ 000 to \$ 30 @, @ 000 in increments of \$ 10 @, @ 000 ; then to \$ 50 @, @ 000 , \$ 100 @, @ 000 , \$ 500 @, @ 000 , and \$ 1 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 ; and finally from \$ 2 @, @ 500 @, @ 000 to \$ 10 @, @ 000 @, @ 000 with the dollar value doubling for each new question .

Contestants were given the standard three lifelines in place at the time ( 50 : 50 , Ask the Audience , and Phone @-@ a @-@ Friend ) at the beginning of the game . However , after correctly answering the \$ 100 @, @ 000 question , the contestant earned two additional lifelines : Three Wise Men and Double Dip . The Three Wise Men lifeline involved a panel of three experts , one of whom was always a former Millionaire contestant and at least one of whom was female . When this lifeline was used , the contestant and panel had 30 seconds to discuss the question and choices before the audio and video feeds were dropped . If the contestant decides to use Double Dip , the contestant is then forbidden from walking away from the question and is given two chances to answer the given question and if both answers are wrong , the contestant drops to \$ 100 @, @ 000 .

= = = 10th Anniversary Celebration = = =

To celebrate the tenth anniversary of Millionaire 's U.S. debut , the show returned to ABC primetime for an eleven @-@ night event hosted by Philbin , which aired August 9 ? 23 , 2009 . The Academy Award @-@ winning movie Slumdog Millionaire and the 2008 economic crisis helped boost interest of renewal of the game show .

The episodes featured game play based on the previous rule set of the syndicated version ( including the rule changes implemented in season seven ) but used the Fastest Finger round to select contestants . Various celebrities also made special guest appearances at the end of every episode ; each guest played one question for a chance at \$ 50 @, @ 000 for a charity of their choice

, being allowed to use any one of the four lifelines in place at the time ( Phone @-@ a @-@ Friend , Ask the Audience , Double Dip , and Ask the Expert ) , but still earned a minimum of \$ 25 @,@ 000 for the charity if they answered the question incorrectly .

The finale of the tenth anniversary special , which aired on August 23 , 2009 , featured Ken Basin , an entertainment lawyer , Harvard Law graduate , and former Jeopardy ! contestant , who went on to become the first contestant to play a \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 question in the " clock format " era . With a time of 4 : 39 ( 45 seconds + 3 : 54 banked time ) , Basin was given a question involving President Lyndon Baines Johnson 's fondness for Fresca . Using his one remaining lifeline , Basin asked the audience , which supported his own hunch of Yoo @-@ hoo rather than the correct answer . He decided to answer the question and lost \$ 475 @,@ 000 , becoming the first contestant in the U.S. version to answer a \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 question incorrectly . After Basin finished his run , Vieira appeared on @-@ camera and announced that all remaining Fastest Finger contestants would play with her on the first week of the syndicated version 's eighth season . After this , the million dollar question was not played again on a standard episode until September 25 , 2013 , when Josina Reaves became the second U.S. Millionaire contestant to incorrectly answer her \$ 1 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 question .

= = = Million Dollar Tournament of Ten = = =

Although the syndicated Millionaire had produced two millionaires in its first season , Nancy Christy 's May 2003 win was still standing as the most recent when the program began its eighth season in fall of 2009 . Deciding that six @-@ plus years had been too long since someone had won the top prize , producers conducted a tournament to find a third million dollar winner . For the first nine weeks of the 2009 ? 10 season , each episode saw contestants attempt to qualify for what was referred to as the " Tournament of Ten " . Contestants were seeded based on how much money they had won , with the biggest winner ranked first and the lowest ranked tenth . Ties were broken based on how much time a contestant had banked when they had walked away from the game .

The tournament began on the episode aired November 9 , 2009 , and playing in order from the lowest to the highest seed , tournament contestants played one at a time at the end of that episode and the next nine . The rules were exactly the same as they were for a normal million dollar question under the clock format introduced the season before , except here , the contestants had no lifelines at their disposal . Each contestant received a base time of 45 seconds . For each question they had answered before walking away , the contestants received any unused seconds that were left when they gave their answers . The accumulated total of those unused seconds was then added to the base time to give the contestants their final question time limit .

Each contestant had the same decision facing them as before , which was whether to attempt to answer the question or walk away with their pre @-@ tournament total intact . Attempting the question and answering incorrectly incurred the same penalty as in regular play , with a reduction of their pre @-@ tournament winnings to \$ 25 @,@ 000 . If the question was answered correctly , the player that did so became the tournament leader . If another player after him / her answered correctly , that player assumed the lead and the previous leader kept their pre @-@ tournament winnings . The highest remaining seed to have attempted and correctly answered their question at the end of the tournament on November 20 , 2009 would be declared the winner and become the syndicated series ' third millionaire .

The first contestant to attempt to answer the million dollar question was Sam Murray , the tournament 's eighth @-@ seeded qualifier . On November 11 , Murray was asked approximately how many people had lived on Earth in its history and correctly guessed 100 billion . Murray was still atop the leaderboard entering the November 20 finale as he remained the only contestant to even attempt to answer his or her question . The only person who could defeat him was top seed and \$ 250 @,@ 000 winner Jehan Shamsid @-@ Deen , who was asked a question regarding the Blorengé , cited as " a rare example of a word that rhymes with orange " . Shamsid @-@ Deen considered taking the risk , believing ( correctly ) that the name belonged to a mountain in Wales . However , she decided that the potential of losing \$ 225 @,@ 000 did not justify the risk and elected

to walk away from the question , giving Murray the win and the million dollar prize .

= = Reception = =

Since its introduction to the United States , Who Wants to Be a Millionaire has been credited with not only single @-@ handedly reviving the game show genre , but also breaking new ground for it . The series revolutionized the look and feel of game shows with its unique lighting system , dramatic music cues , and futuristic set . The show also became one of the highest @-@ rated and most popular game shows in U.S. television history , and has been credited with paving the way for the rise of the reality TV phenomenon to prominence throughout the 2000s .

The U.S. Millionaire also made catchphrases out of various lines used on the show . In particular , " Is that your final answer ? " , asked by Millionaire 's hosts whenever a contestant 's answer needs to be verified , was popularized by Philbin during his tenure as host , and was also included on TV Land 's special " 100 Greatest TV Quotes and Catch Phrases " , which aired in 2006 . Meanwhile , during his tenure as host , Cedric signed off shows with a catchphrase of his own , " Watch yo ' wallet ! " .

The original primetime version of the U.S. Millionaire won two Daytime Emmy Awards for Outstanding Game / Audience Participation Show in 2000 and 2001 . Philbin was honored with a Daytime Emmy in the category of Outstanding Game Show Host in 2001 , while Vieira received one in 2005 , and another in 2009 . TV Guide ranked the U.S. Millionaire # 7 on its 2001 list of the 50 Greatest Game Shows of All Time , and later ranked it # 6 on its 2013 " 60 Greatest Game Shows " list . GSN ranked Millionaire # 5 on its August 2006 list of the 50 Greatest Game Shows of All Time , and later honored the show in January 2007 on its only Gameshow Hall of Fame special .

= = Other media = =

= = = Merchandise = = =

In 2000 , Pressman released two board game adaptations of Millionaire as well as a junior edition recommended for younger players . Several video games based on the varying gameplay formats of Millionaire have also been released throughout the course of the show 's U.S. history .

Between 1999 and 2001 , Jellyvision produced five video game adaptations based upon the original primetime series for personal computers and Sony 's PlayStation console , all of them featuring Philbin 's likeness and voice . The first of these adaptations was published by Disney Interactive , while the later four were published by Buena Vista Interactive which had just been spun off from DI when it reestablished itself in attempts to diversify its portfolio . Of the five games , three featured general trivia questions , one was sports @-@ themed , and another was a " Kids Edition " featuring easier questions . In 2008 , Imagination Games released a DVD version of the show , based on the 2004 ? 08 format and coming complete with Vieira 's likeness and voice , as well as a quiz book and a 2009 desktop calendar . Additionally , two Millionaire video games were released by Ludia in conjunction with Ubisoft in 2010 and 2011 ; the first of these was a game for Nintendo 's Wii console and DS handheld system based on the 2008 ? 10 clock format , while the second , for Microsoft 's Xbox 360 , was based on the current shuffle format .

Ludia has also created a Facebook game based on Millionaire , which debuted on March 21 , 2011 . This game features an altered version of the shuffle format , condensing the number of questions to twelve ? eight in round one , and four in round two . A contestant can compete against eight other Millionaire fans in round one , and play round two alone if they make it into the top three . There is no " final answer " rule ; the contestant 's responses are automatically locked in . Answering a question correctly earns a contestant the value of that question , multiplied by the number of people who responded incorrectly . Contestants are allowed to use two of their Facebook friends as Jump the Question lifelines in round one , and to use the Ask the Audience lifeline in round two to invite up to 50 such friends of theirs to answer a question for a portion of the prize money of the current

question .

= = = Disney Parks attraction = = =

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire ? Play It ! was an attraction at the Disney 's Hollywood Studios theme park ( when it was known as Disney @-@ MGM Studios ) at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando , Florida and at Disney California Adventure Park in Anaheim , California . Both the Florida and California Play It ! attractions opened in 2001 ; the California version closed in 2004 , and the Florida version closed in 2006 and was replaced by Toy Story Midway Mania !

The format in the Play It ! attraction was very similar to that of the television show that inspired it . When a show started , a " Fastest Finger " question was given , and the audience was asked to put the four answers in order ; the person with the fastest time was the first contestant in the Hot Seat for that show . However , the main game had some differences : for example , contestants competed for points rather than dollars , the questions were set to time limits , and the Phone @-@ a @-@ Friend lifeline became Phone a Complete Stranger which connected the contestant to a Disney cast member outside the attraction 's theater who would find a guest to help . After the contestant 's game was over , they were awarded anything from a collectible pin , to clothing , to a Millionaire CD game , to a 3 @-@ night Disney Cruise .