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RTVStar hooks up reality TV

Producers, potential casts can meet online

By Bill Keveney
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A new Web site hopes to be a matchmaker for reality TV hopefuls and the genre's casting directors.

RTVStar.com, which goes online Monday, plans to offer subscribers a streamlined application process to gain them consideration for multiple cable and network shows.

To encourage the participation of casting executives — a necessity if the online service is to succeed — RTVStar.com will tout the opportunity to save time and money via a detailed database that lets them fine-tune candidate searches.

Brian Ostrovsky, a 24-year-old Sacramento native, came up with the concept after watching his wife spend many hours to apply to three shows. He likens RTVStar, which will charge hopefuls \$24.99 a year, to the online common application available for colleges. He designed the reality TV form, saying about 75% of the content of the shows' applications are the same.

Currently, applicants usually apply by mail or e-mail to individual shows, often finding links at Web sites. Casting directors also find contestants through on-air promotions, open casting calls in various cities and ads



Amazing Race 5 winners, Chip and Kim McAllister

placed everywhere from newspapers to Craigslist.org.

RTVStar subscribers will provide information about age, profession and other personal traits and upload a picture and a video, a requirement for many shows. Though they won't be applying to specific shows, they can specify an interest, such as the dating or travel-adventure genres.

"Our real value is for those who would like to be (considered for) multiple shows or multiple seasons" of continuing hits, Ostrovsky says. He estimates there are up to 100 current or upcoming shows. The profile could be seen by "casting directors even for shows that haven't been announced yet."

Casting professionals who have said they will use the service work on such shows as *The Bachelor*, *Beauty and the Geek* and *Survivor*, according to RTVStar, along with those who recruited casts for *Supernanny*, *I Want to Be a Hilton* and NBC's upcoming *Treasure Hunters*.

Hilton producers Eric Bischoff and Jason Hervey are investors in RTVStar.com and co-chairmen of its advisory board. *Amazing Race 5* winners Chip and Kim McAllister have been hired to help promote it.

Marla Brodsky, casting director of *Extreme Makeover*, says the site should make a useful supplement, especially since it offers the ability to screen for specific characteristics, as *Makeover* might do if it were looking for overweight teens.

"You can search for exactly what you're looking for, and see a photo and video," says Brodsky, who has no financial ties to RTVStar. "I can't see why any casting director wouldn't use this, in addition to their regular casting ways."

R.J. Cutler, who has produced *American Candidate* and *Freshman Diaries*, says RTVStar probably wouldn't work for him. He often seeks candidates within specific environments, such as schools, and tries to avoid people who are seeking to be on a reality show.

Hervey, who played Wayne in *The Wonder Years*, is betting that most reality shows will find the new service hard to resist. "On any given type of show, you're going to travel from five to 15 cities to find your cast. This could extend your reach beyond those cities or allow you to cut back" on travel.