

The Outlook

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Casting call: Actors can get discovered on the Web

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Forget the cold calls. Don't bother dreaming of being discovered at the local coffee-shop counter. Starving artists can now be discovered even while they sleep, as long as they have left their best work somewhere on the World Wide Web.

The medium through which companies are trying to sell all manner of products is also a medium that entertainment-industry professionals are using to sell themselves.

"Exposure is everything," said Mark Baker, who along with his twin brother, Mathew, founded and runs a Web site called World Wide Stars. Their site, started as a free resource about 18 months ago, now charges each performer \$99 for a year of time online.

"I wanted to have a grace period where people could get on and have nothing to lose," Baker said of the first six months he offered free. The site now boasts 250 members; two commercials have been

cast exclusively from the site.

World Wide Stars accepts only union-affiliated performers who already have agents, but plans to add a section for unrepresented talent. That could prove to be a real asset to aspiring stars trapped by the entertainment industry's own Catch-22 — you can't get a job until you join a union but you can't join the union until you've had a union job.

Through this new medium, anybody's face and resume can be posted for industry professionals to see.

There are many variations of this setup on the Web, with prices and content that vary greatly.

Some sites, like Internet Stage and Screen Resources and Centerstage@Buzz post job listings, offer reviews of current stage and screen shows and all manner of pre- and post-production personnel and services, and even maintain online chat rooms.

One site in particular, Screen Test



Online, wanted to do even more. Jeff Lucas, with the help of Charles Wyke-Smith at Printz Electronic Design, tried to bring the whole audition to your monitor.

The service, which had about 200 performers' material online, offered the ability to search for a performer with specific characteristics. The script for searching the product would allow you to

look, for example, for a 14-year-old girl with red hair and green eyes whose skills include juggling and pole vaulting. And if you found her, you could download and view her one-minute performance.

The hitch, according to Lucas, was "We were two years ahead of the game." Unfortunately, even with today's streaming of images and sounds, a technology that was unavailable in October 1995, the video material cannot be delivered with the speed and resolution necessary for professional use.

Currently, casting agents send out a call for whatever type of actor they need

for a part. Agents get the specifications, go through their files and grab photos and resumes of the clients they think meet the requirements. Then the casting agent has to sift through a pile of material and let the agents know which actors they want to audition.

But now, as Andrew Williams, vice president for creative advertising at 20th Century Fox puts it, producers can turn to their computers instead of issuing mass casting calls. "Instead of going through the normal channels, casting calls with hundreds of applicants, they can just sit down at a computer, click, click and they are done," Williams said.

"As these sites become filled with actors and actresses, they will become accepted," he added. While no one is yet doing lunch on the Web, "When people realize that they can get quality people for their films, the industry will come around."

Graham Elwood has his resume posted

Cyberlife

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with World Wide Stars and was one of 15 men called to audition for a national car manufacturer's commercial. All the actors who auditioned were culled from the Web site. While Elwood did not get the part, he said the site was "an excellent tool."

"With this, they can narrow the field just by sitting at a computer," he added.

ADDRESS BOOK:

- World Wide Stars

<http://www.worldstars.com>

■ Internet Stage and Screen Resources

<http://www.stagenet.com>

■ Centerstage@Buzz

<http://www.buzznyc.com>

■ Screen Test Online

<http://www.screen-test-online.com>

■ Theatre Central

<http://www.theatre-central.com>

■ The Virtual Headbook

<http://www.xmission.com/~winfrnx/virtual.html>