

The Business of Searching for an American Idol

Bv Gian Fiero

What's the appeal of American Idol? Many people say that it's the chance to see the future music stars of tomorrow that intrigues and appeals to them. Others say that they are entertained by Simon Cowell's blistering comments which are delivered under the guise of "constructive criticism." Whatever the reason, 26.5 million viewers made the airing of the first show in its second season, the highest rated non-sports program in Fox's young television history.

While similar but dispensable shows like "Making of the Band" and "Pop Stars" created the formula and early prototype for vehicles that could transport up and coming artists to commercial success, American Idol didn't jump on the bandwagon, they created one. Using a wealth of industry experience, knowledge, and resources as their main tools, they have built a show that feeds the voracious appetite of today's Pop culture that loves reality

his is reality TV for singers. The opportunities are real. The singing is real. The rejection and criticism are real. When American Idol's television audience becomes desensitized to Simon's scathing remarks and actually listen to the truth behind them, they will realize that what he lacks in diplomacy, he easily compensates for with his insight. He is the real star of this show.

Despite the fun that's made of the lesser talented singers, some are very good. But the industry is full of good singers. American Idol is not looking for them. They are looking for singers who "it." (That's have the industry description of someone that has a combination of charisma, charm, sex appeal, attitude, personality, AND talent.) Singers who are merely talented are of no use to today's industry executives who seek to capitalize on more than just singing skill.

f you pay close attention while watching American Idol, you will notice that the more attractive contestants not only make the show, they tend to advance into the later rounds of competition. American Idol has placed an emphasis on the importance of (and given an advantage to those) having a "look," and why not? The requirement of looking good is a rule that they are merely following, not creating. It's not just because the contestants and future music stars need to look good on television, looking good (or stylish) is now imperative for success in the Pop. R&B, & Country music fields. Take a look at the top acts on the charts and you can easily confirm this.

Most of the show's top acts get signed same management/record the company (19 Recordings Limited, a division of 19 Entertainment) which is owned by Simon Fuller (not Simon Cowell the judge), who named his company after the 1985 hit, "19," by Paul Hardcastle, the instrumental artist he once managed. His company also produces American Idol and Pop Idol in England.

Only a few of the contestants will be given recording contracts, but everyone who appears on the show must grant exclusive "options and rights" to 19 Recordings Limited. They negotiate with a variety of entertainment professionals and entities for access to. and the use of, the talents of the American Idol contestants – regardless of how well they do, or how far they go on the show. So in essence, this show can be called, "American A&R."

Unlike Star Search which was instrumental in exposing many models, comedians, and singers, American Idol deals strictly with the 15-25 year old demographic, (which also purchases the largest amount of records.) most of which have musical aspirations of their own or friends who have them. They now have a new bona fide springboard © Copyright 2004. All Rights Reserved. to launch their careers.

t's too early to tell how high American Idol will launch the careers of the show's contestants. The music industry has changed significantly since the original Star Search which introduced tremendously successful Pop artists that include Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Justin Timberlake, Aaliyah, and Usher – just to name a few.

Star Search was not (and is not) offering the assistance, nor the support that American Idol does in helping music artists to become famous. The aforementioned artists all worked hard for many years to get the breaks that lead to their success. Star Search merely documented the beginning of their journey. American Idol offers and promises much more. and have contestants far reaching obligations to the show and the company that produces it.

By letting us in on the process of finding talent, and giving us the right to vote for singers that we think are talented, we are given the privilege to select an artist that we like; so we then have no excuse not to buy their record because we have a relationship with them and we want them to do well. It trulv is clever marketing. effectiveness of it will determine how long the show will last - whether or not any of its contestants graduate to stardom.

t may not take much longer with 3 of last years acts scheduled to release CDs this summer (2003). If only half of the 26 million viewers buy a CD, there will be a whole lot of money made for the artists, but for 19 Entertainment, their high Nielsen ratings and ability to command hefty advertising dollars has established American Idol as a large, healthy, and very fertile cash cow. And when it comes right down to it, that's what the business of the American Idol is really all about.