

Music Magazine Cues Up Rival for "American Idol"

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Television: Billboard's singing competition would leverage online voting.

Taking a page from "American Idol," Billboard magazine is launching a talent show, "Billboard Next."

America's oldest music industry publication has teamed with Los Angeles based Associated Talent Management to package the TV show and Fluid Music Inc. to use the Internet and mobile devices to engage viewers.

Fluid Music created the musical talent competition Web site "American Idol Underground," licensing the name from the TV show. Fluid will use the "Underground" format for "Next": Unsigned performers are ranked by the number of online listeners they draw.

Organizers hope to launch the Web site this year and produce the show in 2009.

But Billboard needs to hire a production company before Associate Talent Management can even begin shopping the show to broadcast and cable networks.

The top six artists or groups with the most listeners online will advance to the TV show. On the program, a panel of three celebrity judges and one judge taken from the Web site's pool of amateur music reviewers will choose the winner.

Unlike Fox's hit show "American Idol," "Billboard Next" will involve the audience in the nominating process.

"We wanted to create a competition that was more democratic than 'American Idol,'" said Dan Levin, Associated Talent Management's chief executive and "Billboard Next's" production partner.

Billboard's talent competition will differ from "American Idol" in other ways, too. It will allow individual artists and groups from all genres to compete. Bluegrass, jazz, rhythm and blues, and metal will be in the mix along with country, pop and rock.

Winners for each genre will be invited to go on concert tours. The "Billboard Next" show is expected to air sometime next year.

-Brett Sporich

