

DEL MAR TIMES

BUSINESS > COMPANIES

Carmel Valley company home to TV show

By Lee Schoenbart

Contributor

USA television network isn't the only place where characters are welcome. Just ask Ken Gora of Carmel Valley's Next Productions.

"The VP Contest" - a late-night, REM-state concoction of Gora's - might just be the next big wave in executive recruiting.

Gora is the head honcho of Next Productions, a marketing and production firm composed of professionals in the recruiting, business-to-business outsourcing, television and entertainment, and marketing industries. The reality contest idea came to him in a dream after being convinced to take a gander at such TV programs as "The Shark Tank," "The Bachelor," "American Idol" and "Celebrity Apprentice." (Gora was unaware of "Apprentice's" British predecessor who would admonish: "You are the weakest link!")

Beginning with "The VP Contest" on April 30, 25 contestants will compete to sell different corporate sponsors' products for seven weeks in an elimination setting to win the grand prize of \$100,000 and a salaried vice president of sales position. Next Productions is filming all phases of its reality sales competition in hopes of creating a pilot TV program to be sold to and carried by network or cable programming.

Among the 26 major cities throughout the United States over the next 12 months in which Gora plans to recruit and film will be Phoenix, San Jose and Los Angeles. Gora held auditions in San Diego on April 15 and 21 at the Grand Del Mar Resort and Next Productions offices on High Bluff Drive, respectively.

About the potential contestants, Gora said: "Here's the fine line that I walk. On one hand, as someone who's had over 25 years' experience in professional recruiting, I have to make hard, smart decisions. Do they have a track record of success in sales and marketing, do they look like their personality has the drive to succeed.

"On the other hand," Gora said, "if you watch the video of me on the ("VP Contest") home page, I clearly say, 'I don't care if you're right out of college or if you're semiretired or you're a superstar. Tell me why you should be in this contest and you can win it all.'"

"This is for the man or the woman who said they never had a chance, that they're stuck in a dead-end job or they can't get a job because of the economy," said Gora, a founding member of the Institute for Applied Behavioral Sciences with a Ph.D and M.A. in psychology. "If they show up at an audition, and if they 'sell' me that they can do well, they may be in over the person who has 15 years of great sales experience.

"I take chances with some people," he said, "and yet, at the same time, for the most part, I look for solid sales experience and people who have that 'wow' factor or desire."

Gora also offered some sage real-world business advice for when the tables are turned and these men and women seek representation by an executive search firm when making a career move.

"Have your resume looked at by at least three other people because most recruiters at executive search firms look for certain things and many times resumes don't portray someone as well as they could or should," he said. "Emphasize, with specific examples, what you've done and how you did it. That's more important than how long you were at somewhere. You could emphasize that with bullets on the resume or live in the interview."

Until "The VP Contest" does become a reality itself with a network or cable TV deal, Gora also views the process as documentation of the business experience for all the participants.

"This is a sales contest and business to business program that makes companies money and gives contestants cash prizes, commissions and a \$100,000-a-year job," he said. "If there was no such thing as television, this contest and tournament could still exist.

"(However), there's this reality TV component of it meaning a contestant doesn't have to be in the program and a sponsor's company doesn't have to be in the program. There is an option to edit them out.

"But the point I wanted to make is, unlike most reality TV programs, I call this the 'reality about reality' and that is there's no drama," he said. "This is more an entertaining play by play documentary of how individuals will each have a compelling story to sell and market their way to success."

Auditioning for Gora's production is not for the faint-hearted and would-be contestants ought to carefully consider his words.

"My advice would be to really look in the mirror and ask yourself, are you determined to do what it takes to work hard at sales and marketing and, if so, come to the audition and tell me why, show me why.

"It's kind of like American Idol," he said. "If you're ever going to sing well, in that audition, you've got to give the performance of your life."

For audition and sponsorship information, call (858) 755-9914 or e-mail info@thevpcontest.com.

To learn more, visit www.thevpcontest.com.

View a video about the production at www.youtube.com/user/thevpcontest.



Carmel Valley resident, entrepreneur and Next Productions owner Ken Gora with Sandi Hammons, one of the contest judges as well as founder and chief executive officer of her own cosmetics firm.



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Solana Beach SUN

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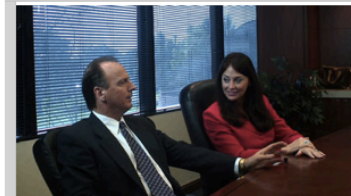
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