

Leadership in Hollywood  
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## DIGITAL DO-IT-YOURSELFERS

From financing to marketing and distribution, savvy filmmakers are using the Internet to take control of how their films are made and seen

By Scott Kirsner

### The fate of Caveh Zahedi's

film is, unfortunately, a familiar one for independent filmmaker Zahedi: a company that controlled the home-video rights went out of business. So, Zahedi's directorial debut, "A Little Stiff," effectively vanished.

It wasn't until Zahedi bumped into Jonathan Green, a former AOL executive from the Web site GreenCine.com, at a film festival screening that the chance presented itself. Reissuing the black-and-white film on DVD would've been too complicated and costly, so GreenCine and GreenCine would split the rental revenue.

"Stiff" has been available on GreenCine.com since last year. GreenCine acknowledges it's small. "I'm not retiring just yet," says Green.

But Zahedi is one of a far-flung group

### CASTING AND EDITING

Steelyard Pictures founder Leone Marucci had a script and a star. The script was "The Power of Few," a story about cloning and terrorism told from six different perspectives, and the star was Q'orianka Kilcher, seen last year in "The New World." What Marucci lacked was buzz that might help attract financiers, other actors and prospective distributors.

By partnering with Jumpcut.com, a San Francisco-based site that enables users to do rudimentary video editing then share the results, Marucci was able to generate crucial early buzz.

First, Marucci announced that he'd post raw footage from an action sequence on the site and invite would-be editors to cut their own version. The best version, Marucci promised, would be included in the finished film.

Then, Marucci was struck by an idea in the shower. "What could we do more immediately than that?" he recalls asking himself. "Why not cast one of the roles on the Web?"

Marucci invited actors to audition for the part of Carmen, a pizza-shop counter worker who pops up for just one scene. Hundreds of people uploaded audition videos — some shot in actual pizza shops and others intercut with footage that Marucci provided of Kilcher reading her character's lines. Visitors to Jumpcut voted for their favorites, and Marucci cast the part from among the top 20 vote-getters.

"Our film gets a little more exposure, and it's exposure for the actors," Marucci says. "Every film tries to connect with its audience, but we're trying to do it ahead of the film, even before the advertising."

as an opportunity — not as a threat to the business. While this year's headlines have focused on studios' tentative experiments with downloading a portion of the independent filmmaking budget for more radical research and development, there are innovative ways of using the Internet not just to make films available as legal downloads, but to find ways to cast and edit them, to get feedback from audiences and promote them and even secure theatrical distribution.

### THINKERS

Robert Greenwald, director of Brave New Films' "The War on Terror," with the film's DVD extras. Jumpcut.com's Jonathan Marlow shows off his work. Director Brian Terwilliger, left, with Sydney Tamiia Poitier, 2005's "One Six Right."

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### FINANCING

Culver City documentarian Robert Greenwald calls himself "a failed fundraiser." "It's always been a challenge," says the director of Brave New Films' "Iraq for Sale: The War Profiteers," released in September.

ground." But when podcast viewers went to the "Four Eyed Monsters" Web site, Crumley and Buice enlisted them in a campaign to get the movie shown in theaters. Fans of the podcast could enter their e-mail address and ZIP code if they wanted to see the movie screened in their city; a friend of Crumley's found a way to plot those requests on a map, and whenever one city accumulated 150 requests, Crumley and Buice started lobbying art houses for a screening — either splitting the ticket revenue with the theater or renting the venue outright.

"With theaters, we discovered that if we could show them people's ZIP codes, that trips out a huge amount of risk for them," Crumley says. In September, the pair organized screenings in six cities.

"The infrastructure is changing," Buice says. "Instead of pushing films into theaters with lots of marketing money, audience pull is going to be the way that more films get into theaters."