

Time Out

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AD BUSTERS
Eager grads find
out reality bites.

The thrill to shill

Americans have done a lot of crazy crap in the name of reality game shows. Some have eaten animal testicles. Others have made out with Evan Marriott. Still others have camped out with Melissa Rivers. But last month, eight recent college grads agreed to spend five straight days living and working at a downtown ad agency in hopes of taking home the game's spoils: the opportunity to bust your ass for 60 hours a week while earning less than 30 grand. At least on *The Price Is Right*, Bob Barker sends you home with a nice dinette set.

When DiMassimo Brand Advertising had a position to fill, a few employees hatched the idea for "Account Executive Survivor." Eight hungry youths would compete for the job. The contestants, who were selected from more than 200 applicants, spent the week working in teams on actual projects for actual agency clients, including Comcast and the Plaza hotel. "It's like an internship on steroids," says managing partner Lee Goldstein. And except for brief field trips

to shower (at Crunch gym, another client), the eight spent all their time in the agency, even bunking on the concrete-and-wood floor in sleeping bags. Twice during the week, a panel of judges, including agency founder Mark DiMassimo, engaged in that delicious staple of reality shows: voting the weaklings off the island. By Thursday afternoon, four were gone, with at least one castoff shedding tears.

Crying over this? With the market so tight, job hunters are clearly willing to do almost anything for a gig. "Sleeping on the floor definitely wasn't fun—my back still hurts," says winner Annie O'Rourke, 22. "But we just graduated college, so there are worse things that we've done recently."

Scattered moments of drama aside, had the contest been televised, we'd fear for the ratings. Participants insisted there was no infighting, no surreptitious alliances and worst of all, no hookups. Says nonsurvivor Karine Ng, "We didn't even have time to eat, much less time to cause scandal." —Reed Tucker