

Big Brother gets beat up by press, public, and CBS execs are smiling

By Craig McGuire

STUDIO CITY, CA: Dull, dysfunctional houseguests, media pummeling and an unusual lawsuit are generating tons of negative PR for CBS' *Big Brother* – and network bigs couldn't be happier.

"When it comes to *Big Brother*, the old saying holds true," said Gil Schwartz, EVP Communications for CBS Television. "There's just no such thing as bad publicity." Looking to spice up its stoic ensemble last week, CBS planned to dangle \$10,000 to entice any member to leave – with an attractive 22-year-old Floridian named Beth prepared to take his or her place in the house.

However, a viewer quickly rushed over to the compound and spilled the beans via bullhorn, forcing producers to up the ante to \$50,000 – but all houseguests declined the offer.

Despite the apparent "failure," Wednesday's show won its time period in households verses the other major networks. This hasn't happened since the show's debut in June. And while journalists from

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Big deal... looking to stimulate excitement, CBS offered \$50,000 to any member willing to leave

LA to New York ridiculed the show, most mainstream media outlets tuned in to cover it. Though the show hasn't come close to the runaway success of *Survivor* – or its

European counterparts for that matter – *Big Brother* is performing better than reruns, drawing 31% more households and 173% more viewers aged 18-34 than CBS

did last summer.

From media columnists to water-cooler critics, *Big Brother* bashing is all the rage these days.

In fact, disgruntled viewer

Jeff Oswald hired a pilot to fly over the *Big Brother* house with banners, one of which read: "*Big Brother* is worse than u think. Get out now." The result: a prominently placed exclusive in *The Los Angeles Daily News*.

"From the beginning critics had a bug up their nose about *Big Brother*," said Schwartz. "They're doing whatever they can to dismiss it, but we're quite pleased because they're actually raising the awareness."

If unbalanced viewers and smug critics weren't enough, now there's even a wacky lawsuit coming (in addition to the one CBS plans to bring against banner-flying Oswald).

Marvin Rosenblum, the Chicago producer who owns the rights to George Orwell's *1984*, is suing the show's producers, claiming they ripped off concepts from the dystopian classic.

"With these events and the *1984* case, the show is making news," said Schwartz. "When you can generate news value, you've struck a gold mine, because the media is now chasing you."