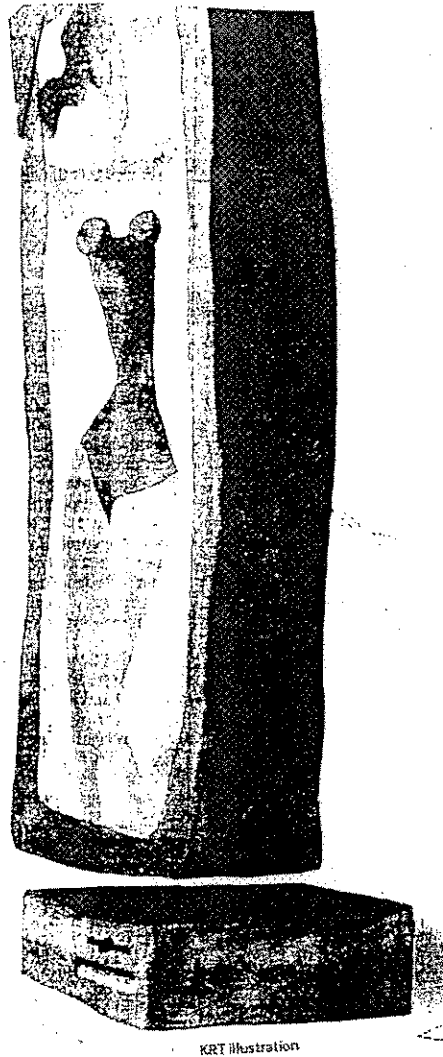
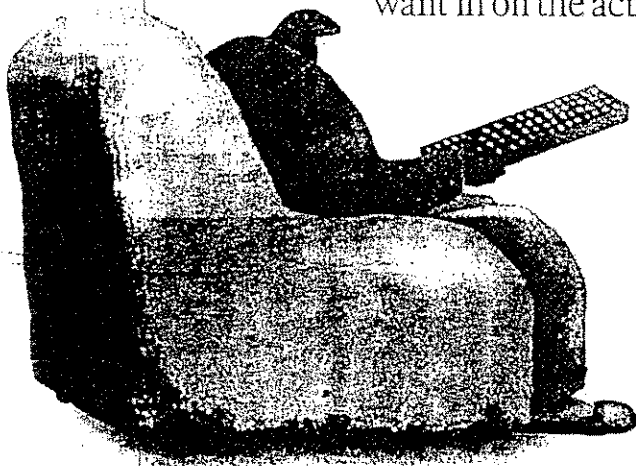


0607

The naked TRUTH

Never before has there been such a proliferation of sex and erotic material on television. Now, Canadians want in on the action.



KRT illustration

TONY ATHERTON
OTTAWA CITIZEN

Sex is everywhere on Canadian TV. Not just the hormonal musings on *Friends*, or the provocative exchange of lip-gloss on *Ally McBeal*, but unabashed nudity and sweaty coupling.

Specialty channel Showcase revels in it. Bravo! regularly indulges. Digital service *SexTV* runs soft-core porn for six hours every night. *Pridevision* serves up explicit entertainment for the gay and lesbian market. Sex, in an infinite variety of unlaced permutations, is available 24 hours a day on Playboy TV. Explicit pay-per-view adult films reportedly gross as much as \$50 million a year for Canadian cable and satellite companies.

But while Canadians are awash in TV sex, virtually none of it is Canadian. Sex is the forbidden final frontier of Canadian content, a genre that reaps obscene profits but which still makes producers squeamish.

That just doesn't make sense, says Ottawa sex therapist Sue McGarvie, who is hoping to launch her own erotic digital channel in the fall.

"Sex is the second most powerful drive in the human body. You're always going to have restaurants and you're always going to have prostitutes... We're wired that way."

McGarvie says Canadian producers are just beginning to give in to temptations of the flesh. The ferocity with which sex has recently been embraced by TV, the most conservative of media, is beginning to melt their reserve. And once the dam is broken, "people are going to rush to catch up."

You can already see the cracks. Canadian production companies have flirted with adult programming in a flurry of titillating documentary series — *Sex in the 20th Century*, *The Sex Files*, *Kink*. Yet producers have tended to draw the line at paying people to perform in a way intended to arouse. They still don't want to be seen to be selling sex.

That line was crossed this season, however, by a show that came to TV through the back door. *Naked News TV*, a half-hour weekly pay-per-view

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SEX THERAPIST SUE MCGARVIE

series made in Toronto, grows out of *NakedNews.com*, a three-year-old Canadian-based Web site.

The site draws six million unique visitors each month with a legitimate daily newscast in which a sedate-looking anchor disrobes while reading real news stories.

Naked News TV is a variation on the Web site's theme.

During the hour-long show, a variety of unclothed news, entertainment and sports readers present offbeat takes on current affairs, oddities and

celebrity gossip. You might call it, well, naked tabloid TV. The show is padded with naked commercial parodies and a tongue-in-cheek look behind the scenes at the *Naked Broadcasting Network, Inc.*

A handful of shows made in the fall proved successful enough for Viewer's Choice to order a full season. In early December, the largest U.S. pay-per-view provider also picked up the series. By the year's end, the U.S. service was reporting *Naked News TV* to be one of its top five sellers. Executive producer Kathy Pinckert says the show is negotiating to become a regular series on a cable channel as soon as this spring.

Naked News TV is precisely the kind of foray into adult programming you might expect from a Canadian producer. It's titillating, but it's also good for you. And it's almost asexual. There is no innuendo, no tease, no double-entendres (OK, there is a segment called *Sports Buff*). The readers are attractive, but not glamorous and they range in age from 20 to 42, with most of them of an age when adult stars have long since retired.

"It's sexy but not sexual," says Pinckert, a former L.A. marketing consultant imported by the Canadian founders of the Web site to bring the concept to TV. She doesn't even like the designation "adult."

"It's not adult. Except for the fact that we have to carry that label because we have full-frontal nudity."

Naked News TV has 12 women presenters and four men, all but three of whom are Canadians.

TV news, and the naked truth

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TONY ATHERTON
Television

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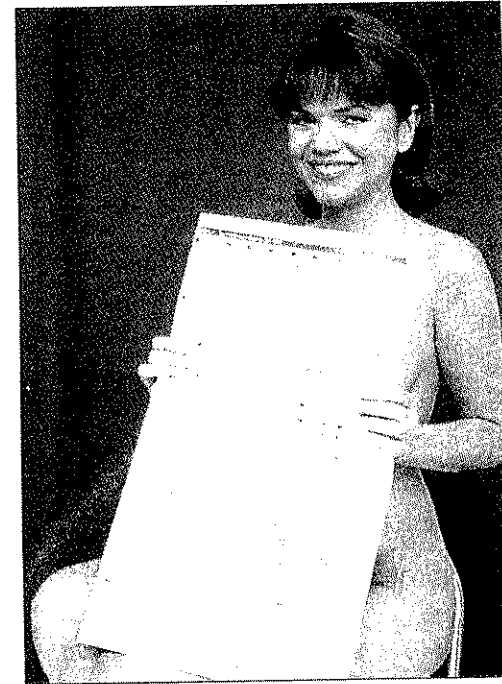
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Carmen Russo of *Naked News*.

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Naked: It's titillating, but it's also good for you

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Naked News TV has 12 women presenters and four men, all but three of whom are Canadians, and none of whom come from the adult industry. The lineup includes a former nanny, an investment banker, a landscaper, a marketing representative, and even a broadcast journalist who last worked at a station in New York. "We have our first real bona fide, degree-in-journalism person on our team now," boasts Pinckert.

While the news readers might occasionally pitch story ideas, most of *Naked News TV*'s news comes from wire services and a handful of stringers.

"Most people see this for themselves as a career builder," says Pinckert. And there's no shortage of folks who want to build such a chilly career. *Naked News*'s first foreign audition in Los Angeles last summer was supposed to run for two days but had to be stretched to

four to handle the crowd.

"I always look for the neck-up qualities first and foremost," says Pinckert. "You've got to have a personality, a nice speaking voice and ability to read and communicate well."

Although *Naked News*' biggest market is the U.S., and its news is mostly international, it doesn't hide its Canadian roots. A recent program featured a segment in which a trio

of *Naked News* readers went shopping for bikinis at a store in the Beaches area of Toronto. Another segment made light of the hockey playing passion of one of the women anchors.

In the summer, the show tapes topless street interviews in Toronto's business district, taking full advantage of an Ontario court ruling that women should be allowed to uncover just as much flesh as men.

"We're very proud to be from Toronto," says Pinckert.

If *Naked News TV* represents a breakthrough, a wedge prying open the door to a full-fledged adult industry where maple leaves replace fig leaves, it is still more about nudity than sex. Coming up this spring on TMN (and on Showcase next year) is the first Canadian series to unabashedly proclaim itself as erotica.

Bliss, an anthology of half-hours based on the stories of women writers as Susan Musgrave and Lazare, is not the first Canadian drama series with sex and nudity. Gratuitous sex has jumped up in export-minded sci-fi fantasy series (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) and in a soap (*Paradise Falls*).

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