

'Pirate' looks for Web buzz

By GORDON COX

The producers of "The Pirate Queen," the new musical from "Les Miserables" creative duo Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg, are ramping up the show's Castcom, a video diary of the tuner's development that was updated daily on the Web during the show's fall tryout in Chicago.

Castcom, which logged 350,000 hits between September and December, reps an unprecedented use of online content in the marketing of a Broadway show. Set to relaunch Tuesday, the redesigned site will incorporate podcasts of the Castcom segments that can be downloaded and viewed on iTunes and iPods.

Creators of the Castcom also are working on a sort of filing system for the episodes, so that viewers with specific interests — costume design, for instance, or a particular actor — can quickly access the segments that match those interests.

"Pirate Queen" producers Moya Doherty and John McColgan ("Riverdance") have spent a chunk of change to provide Castcom with its video content (although they declined to specify the exact amount). They employ two people whose sole job is to follow and record the rehearsal process and edit the footage into brief daily updates.

Whether the initiative proves cost-effective, however, remains unclear.

"It's hard to quantify exactly what it does in terms of ticket sales," McColgan said. "When Castcom gets running again on Tuesday, we'll be watching to see the effect it has on the New York box office." (Currently in rehearsal in Gotham, the musical begins previews at the Hilton Theater March 6.)

Still, both the show's producers and marketers are encouraged by results so far. "I feel confident that it did drive sales," said Damian Bazadona, head of Situation Marketing, the agency behind Castcom.



"The Pirate Queen" is expanding its online video diary Castcom to include segments that can be downloaded on iTunes and iPods.

The original run of Castcom, which coincided with rehearsals and performances of "Queen's" Chi engagement, drove about 10,000 visits to the "Queen" site's ticketing page. During the tryout, 30% of the site's viewership was from users in the Chicago area.

McColgan said he plans to run ads in other media, including print, specifically promoting the Castcom and its Web-only content.

"The one lesson to be learned is, the whole movement of the Web is toward developing engaging content," Bazadona said.

Directed by Frank Galati, "Pirate Queen" — retooled with the help of Graciela Daniele's new musical staging and Richard Maltby's contributions to the book and lyrics — opens April 5.