

# Caught on camera: Big Brother is watching you

Earlier this year, President Putin suggested that anyone who starts a small business in Russia deserves a medal. Rather than idly waiting until business people are garlanded in the Kremlin, however, a more unorthodox idea for celebrating entrepreneurship is gathering momentum: to use television to chart the progress of business people in Russia, as they are challenged by corruption and bureaucracy. Over the next six pages, we speak to those who are championing the show, to business leaders who contextualise the extent of the obstacles faced, and finally to little-known entrepreneurs across Russia's regions, who describe their everyday encounters which, if the show ever came to air, would be beamed straight into Russians' living rooms



## “You have the money – why don’t you make a TV show?”

Vladimir Pozner, Presenter, Russian First Channel and President, Academy of Russian Television

Where did the idea for a reality television show, highlighting the travails of Russian business people, originate? In June 2004 Vladimir Pozner, President of the Academy of Russian Television, met 100 alumni from the Center for Citizen



Initiatives. After listening to their gripes, he challenged them to use their resources and change opinions.

“These people were complaining that nobody likes them,” he remembers. “They said that there was neither a real understanding of the challenges that they face in business nor an appreciation of how they had made their money. I replied: If you have the money and resources – why don’t you get together and make a TV show?”

Entrepreneurs could wait and hope that attitudes change over time, believes Mr Pozner, or they could take to the medium of television to seek to positively

alter attitudes today.

A long-standing believer in the cultural power of television, Mr Pozner suggests that the entrepreneurs may be best looking to Americans, “who seem to appreciate and do these things best”. But most importantly, the business people must not seek to hector the Russian population, but rather gently persuade then through television and bring about a cultural shift. The programme, suggests Pozner, could even “be like *Sex and the City* – except with four business people”. He also cautions against a pure reality show as “many reality shows seem not to show reality, but rather distort and twist real life”. 