

Things To Think About When It Comes To Pitching Your TV Series or Film

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The pitch is an opportunity to engage a bunch of people with something you believe needs to be made. Think of this thing you're making as an exploration, a journey, something to be unpacked, something to hold a light up to, something that needs to be hauled up onto the experimentation table and tested – you decide the analogy, but be clear, you are identifying a part of the human condition that requires our attention and the pitch is an opportunity to get them to buy into that exploration – literally! Think of yourself as a 19th century explorer seeking funds to explore the Northwest Passage.

As a TV series/film maker you're not just an explorer, but also part anthropologist, part detective, part psychologist, and part magician. The storytelling aspect comes from how you manage these roles and apply them within your chosen form, be it TV series or film. A pitch is a chance for you to add the salesperson part to this list and engage us in this quest and to give us confidence that you are a safe pair of hands.

When you pitch, you start by bringing the audience (commissioners, financiers, teammates, juries, workshop attendees) in at an angle, either from the point of view of (i) the storytelling, (ii) the theme, or (iii) you/the team. So for example for (i) storytelling, it could be *"I have to tell you about this incredible story about a two women trying to get a wounded elephant across the Alps"*. Here, by starting with story, you'll want to convey the relationship between the characters, the conflict and the setting. One compressed form of this triangle is the premise, a 'what if', often used within a log line. *"What happens when a teenager is bitten by a spider and given superhuman spider powers?"*.

The second angle, where we focus on theme. Following the spiderman line, *"with great power comes great responsibility"*. A good theme will contain conflict, something paradoxical. It puts its finger on that part of the human condition that interests you most. You might start off with *"we believe that true love is about being 100% open, but don't we often keep certain things from those we love most?"*. Here we'll want to show that we have a firm grasp of the conflicts within the theme and ideally evidence that it affects the audience in some way. These themes are sometimes best described as questions *"does true love require 100% honesty?"*, but not questions with easy answers. Death, love, jealousy, anger, greed etc. are not themes, rather settings in which a theme exists.

And for the third approach, where your focus starts on 'you' and your talents, you might kick off the pitch with *"last year I won an award for directing the TV series X that dealt with Y and that's why this year I'm going to make Z"*. Here we sell the idea that we have a talent in which they will want to engage.

Each approach clearly doesn't prevent you from talking about the other two. And knowing that three approaches exist doesn't mean that you always have to talk about all three. Sometimes by talking about (i) the story and (ii) the theme, we get the bit about (iii) 'you/the team' for free.

Likewise, by talking deeply about the story, the theme simply oozes out. I would argue that unless you're a genius, then the third approach, where you talk about yourself/selves should in some way reflect the story and /or the theme. How you decide to put the whole thing together i.e. the order in which you do it and the weight, on which you place on the three elements, is entirely up to you. This will help you create the logic for your pitch. Once you've decided this, you can see how best to incorporate and convey those other elements regarding the concept, such as genre, format, platform, what stage you are in development, partners, financing, shooting schedule, actors, what you are looking for etc.

It's important to consider the logic of your pitch, simply than just a long list of words that you want to get out. Personally I practice the logic and trust in my brain and mouth to fill in the gaps that get me from A to B (easier for me as English is my mother tongue). That said, it's always good to practice the pitch many, many times, if only to allow your tongue and brain to get used to the words, much like a juggler is constantly throwing anything to hand up in the air. Play with the logic; play with the wording so that you will enjoy involving, engaging and evoking the audience in the reason for why your TV series/film needs to be made.

Some questions that might help you as you juggle with the logic:

Why is this a TV series and not a film, or vice versa?

- It's crucial that you demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference between these two forms.
- If it's a TV series, then we want to understand the repeating engine that will drive each episode as well as drive multiple seasons. The engine is how the story explores and exposes the issues contained within the theme. The more paradoxical a theme, the more there is for the engine to drive.

Why should this TV series/film be made?

- Is it because it's deeply personal to you?
- Because you feel that the world needs to know or question a topic, an issue, a theme?
- Do you feel that there's a subject matter out there that isn't being addressed that should be explored?
- Perhaps you want to revisit something that makes us human and unpack it, poke it, challenge it?
- Maybe you just want to make us laugh, cry, feel empathy around something?

Why should the audience care?

- Why would someone see your TV series/film?
- Why would someone tell someone else to see your TV series/film?
- What would make this TV series/film relevant and to whom. It's not about the usual demographics such as age (unless it's for kids 3 – 15 where you need to show you understand which band you are targeting) or gender, rather think more about it in terms of their emotional state? What's the theme, topic, the characters, the conflict, the actors,

director, format, setting and why does/should the audience give a damn? Perhaps it's all of these, some of them or just one?

- What are people going to agree on and more excitingly, argue about after they've seen your TV series/film? What issues, conflicts and feelings will it raise in the audience as they make their way to bed or on the bus home from the cinema?

How are you going to go about it?

- Is there something we should know about how you will put this TV series/film together that reinforces any of the above? For instance placing particular characters, within a specific conflict, within a particular situation/setting?
- Maybe it's the way in which you will tackle a particular subject matter in a particular tone – a comic way to deal with loss, for instance.
- What could you tell us that would give us confidence in how you can handle the way in which you will put the TV series/film together? Have you done something similar in the past or perhaps you can give us examples of how real world or even fiction tackles this approach?

What will the story be?

- Do we need to get a sense of the chronology of the story?
- Would telling the overall plot help us see why this story needs to be told?
- Do you want to lead us up to the bit just before the end, in order to bring about suspense or would by us knowing the ending of season one, help us to understand why this series/film should be made?

What's the take-away?

- What would you like us to think after the pitch? What do we need to know, feel, remember, sense, question after hearing you delivery your pitch?
- What misunderstandings should your pitch eliminate?

Where are you and what do you need now in order to move forward?

- What state are you in? It is a concept, or is there a first draft of a script? Perhaps you have a synopsis or a treatment that people could see if they were to ask for it?
- Are others interested? Do you have a relationship with a production company that's worth mentioning?
- What do you need from the audience? Their interest and attention or perhaps you are looking for a production company or even someone to finance a particular stage of development?
- Beyond simply being asked to pitch, is there another reason why you are here today?

End.