

TV-how to pitch

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How to pitch an idea for a TV show

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The future of Australian television could rest in your hands, providing you pitch your idea the right way.

If you're tired of bitching about the quality of Australian television, why not put your cursor where your mouth is and write some ideas for new programs? Surveying some of the lamentable TV shows that grace our five networks, you might think that anyone with a lame-arsed idea could become a TV producer - but strangely not! Getting your idea onto the television screen takes a fair bit of commitment, talent and what the industry calls "a Big Idea". Radar spoke with key industry insiders for some tips on how to pitch a television show.

The Big Idea

"A great idea is where any television show begins and ends," says Posie Graeme-Evans, head of drama at the Nine Network. "This business is all about fresh ideas, fresh voices - you can hear them when you are reading a synopsis. The way I know something is good is when I'm not indifferent to it. For me, in the end I want my fingers to be sticking to the page."

Concept document

Once you have come up with your million-dollar Big Idea, you will need to put it into the written word. These words are called a concept document or a synopsis. The document should start with a page summary of what your television show is about and then contain all the details you have for your show. If it's a drama, for example, you'll need a character profile on every character. If it's a game show, who is the host? Where is it set? What time would it screen?

When writing your concept document, always remember the old acronym "KISS - keep it simple, stupid; don't dress it up with decorative language, your idea is the most important thing," says Louise Clarke, lecturer at the Australian Film Television and Radio School. Clark also advises that your concept document should be no longer than three pages.

Knock on doors

There are many ways writers get their ideas into the hands of executives and producers at television networks. Some writers are lucky enough to have connections that can help them get a foot in a door somewhere, but many do not. If you're on the "not" list, you'd best start doing some serious research.

First, think about all the shows you have watched that belong in a similar genre to your idea. Make a list of all the producers that worked on these shows and submit your ideas to them. At the end of a show you like, look at the credits for the name of the production company, head writer, script editor and producer and make contact - these are the people who will be assessing your work. Industry books such as the Encore Directory and The Production Book are also good places to start.

The Pitch

If you have made it this far with your idea you are doing very well. The Pitch is done in a meeting with producers or television executives and has to be punchy and precise.

"A verbal pitch should be about 1 1/2 minutes long and no more than 150 to 200 words," advises writer Sally McLean, of Salmac Productions (www.salmac.com). "Make it succinct, punchy and direct and above all, know your show back to front as they will ask you questions."

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