

Pitcher Perfect

What is The Pitch?

It's a conversation, first and foremost. It should adjust with each person. Who are you reaching out to? What are they looking for? In the end, it is all about relationships.

It's storytelling

People are trained to resist a good sales pitch – no one can resist a good story.

They are looking for strong, distinct characters, conflict, a beginning, middle and end to a film or a TV season.

It's painting pictures

Filmmaking/television is a visual medium – think visual, describe visuals. Use visual images to illustrate theme, conflict, characters,

the world. Once you've finished your conversation, you want your audience to "see" your movie or TV series in their head, so that they willingly buy in. "If I tell you, you will forget, if I show you, you will remember." (Chinese Proverb)

It's risk taking

It is a challenge to willingly show why your heart is in the project, as it ups the ante. But, your passion, your personal perspective and unique take is what makes your material original and may well compel your audience to want to buy in.

It's listening

It's less about how much you say but more about how to listen for and read the reaction to the information you offer. It is as much about you figuring out if this is the person you can work with for the next "three" years, as it is for them to see if you are the person that they can work with for the next "three" years. Their questions often are the first step to them buying in. You want their participation. An added benefit is that their questions may also contribute to clarifying your pitch or approach to the material.

It's a rehearsal for the next pitch

The first pitch rarely "closes a deal." Some can be more successful than others. Key is to consider what your takeaways are after each conversation. Can you incorporate the answers to their questions into your next pitch? Can you address their concerns to prevent them being carried forward?

Pitches/conversations happen in an office, in the hallway, in a bar, in a forum, on the phone, in an elevator – wherever you find yourself wanting to bring someone on side to your project. Never let one of these opportunities slip by with the casual "this is not really a pitch" dismissal. There is never more than one "first" introduction to yourself or your project. Remind yourself of this and make it count.

How do you know if you've had a successful pitch? They want to set up the next meeting.

People are trained to resist a good sales Pitch - no one can resist a good story.



Preparation & Research

Thoroughly research the person, company, broadcaster to whom you will be pitching. The information you discover, may offer a perfect informal opening to your conversation. It helps when the decision maker realizes that you have done your homework on what they may be looking for. They will appreciate your efforts, which may translate into them giving you more consideration. Check out their website. Know their identity/ brand; their broadcast schedule/distribution slate; their past work, the work of their company; people they have worked with previously; their preferred style of meeting.

Attend markets

Cannes, MIP, Content London, Berlin, Hot Docs, AFM, Kid's Screen etc. Create a business strategy for outreach and development in the global industry to determine which events best suit your project and what you should attend on an annual basis.

Read relevant print media and blogs to stay current.

Watch TV in your preferred genre. See at least one episode of everything relevant on the air.

Watch movies

Research the competition. Find out what's already out there.

Practice. Practice. Practice.

If friends and colleagues are confused, chances are, the decision makers may become confused as well.

The Pitch

Be specific

Too often people fall into the trap of describing their project in broad terms to "save time", when a couple of specific examples or strong visual images can take even less time, are more memorable and often more effective. Always deal in specifics, without getting lost in details.

Be selective/economical

It's a very fine line. Focus on the A story/character arcs indicating the overall theme, or in the case of drama series, the essential question. Edit non-essential points, tangents which can confuse and distract. Use

character names. We want to care, and names make them more real. Use images to reveal/illustrate theme, story, character development. This way, you are showing, not telling.

Comparables can sometimes work

When using other movies/TV series as examples, be sure to qualify what the similarities are in the comparison, to avoid general impressions that leave the audience no more informed. Will audiences agree with your taste? Do examples share similar budgets or formats with your project? Are the examples you choose familiar or commercially successful? Sometimes comparisons work, often they don't. The very familiar "it's X meets X with a little of X thrown in." only works if you have specified the comparisons so that it actually further clarifies to the decision maker, what you are going for.

Passion carries a lot of weight, but passion does not "close the deal"

People always want to feel your enthusiasm for a project. But sometimes we rely on our passion and forgo preparation and substance. The decision maker doesn't want to be "told" how passionate you are, they want to witness it in the delivery of the pitch, the world, the story, the characters.

If I tell you, you will forget. If I show you, you will remember.

- Chinese Proverb

The Components

No two pitches are alike. The order and priority of the information exchange in your meeting will vary as often as you consider your individual audience.

Your pitch should “brand” your ownership of the material, highlighting your original approach/point of view and personal passion for the particular subject. The pitch should reveal why you want to tell this story. What’s your “heart” in the story? What is the series central question and how do you connect to this personally? The more you are personally involved, the more your audience is personally drawn in. Inevitably, the decision maker is first interested in you, your sensibilities. This comes out in your approach to the material, your “feeling” for the material. Then they are interested in your project.

Be sure to know the goals of your meeting before going in. Then be clear with your audience what you are looking for from them: e.g. advice/interest, willingness to read the script, development dollars etc.

Be clear about what your decision maker is looking for. Put yourself in the shoes of those to whom you are pitching – what do they need from you to be able to pitch your idea to their colleagues. What is original about your idea? Why is it specifically right for their company, their programming? The stronger the title, short synopsis, central question (in the case of drama series) creative team, the easier it is for them to sell your property.

1. The Introduction

To help focus your audience and to position how they should be listening to you, there are three points you should make right off:

Your name and position on the project

Be clear about the role you will play in this project and present your story with that in mind. Your audience will have different expectations depending on your role. A director’s pitch will naturally present the project in a different manner than that of a producer or that of a writer.

The project length, genre, and format

(episodic, fiction or doc feature, web series etc.). The sooner this question is answered, the less time the audience is left wondering about its format, rather than listening to the story. For documentary is it: investigative, observational, constructed, process, historical, a personal journey?

Where your property is in terms of development

An idea? Treatment? A first draft script? A pitch Bible? a look book? Don’t sell more than what is there. It’s also important not to suggest that an idea has been around for some time (i.e. it’s stale), or that it is so fresh you haven’t spent the preparation time required before taking up a valuable pitch opportunity. As well, it’s important to include what may have changed or developed since you first sent in the package and what you see as your next steps to move the project forward.

2. The Title

Take the time to find the right title

Surprisingly, the title can provide a terrific shortcut to setting the tone, the genre and attracting the intended audience. A good title is often the first tool that can make a project stand out.

3. The Heart

What attracts you to this story/series?

What is the heart of the property for you? For TV drama series – What is the central question? What is your perspective on the material? This is an essential ingredient to any pitch and sometimes the hardest to articulate. This is the element that truly defines your “ownership” of the material.

It can also indicate the emotional impact that you want to have upon your audience.

The more you are personally involved in telling your story, the more the listener is drawn in.

4. The Short Synopsis

(sometimes referred to as the “logline”).

There is a distinct difference between a logline and a short synopsis. A logline generally, presents the set up but does not reveal the whole story. It is used to get the audience into the theatre or watching on television. It is often used in marketing to draw audiences to the series or movie.

For pitching a TV drama series or movie, a good short synopsis, introduces the main character(s), summarizes the main plot (for the first season), the conflict, and the overall arc of the story (beginning, middle, and end). Words should reveal tone, genre, and intended audience. It is generally 70-80 words, 2-3 sentences. It becomes one of the key tools that helps another pitch your story/series to their colleagues. Do not use ornate, long sentences. Shorter ones are easier to read and absorb. The short synopsis is the road map or backbone of the story.

For documentaries, specify the approach (is it controversial, detective, adventure, scientific?). The documentary short synopsis should also present the theme or “heart line” within a few sentences, while also presenting the overall arc of the story. Make every word do double duty. Be evocative.

For drama TV series, the short synopsis should also reveal the central question of the series that drives it forward, from season to season and compels the central character(s) forward.

5. The Long Synopsis

Building on the information given in the short synopsis, the long synopsis (generally 300-350 words or three or four short paragraphs) delves into more specifics. The longer it is, the less likely you will hold the attention of the decision maker. Again, do not use ornate, long sentences. Shorter sentences are easier to hear/read and absorb. The synopsis should not begin with the opening short synopsis because a good short synopsis is a summary of the whole story.

A synopsis reassures your audience that there is structure and clarity in your feature script/first season of your drama series. 1000000000 is unclear, 100,000,000 is clear. Set up the characters and, without getting lost in tangential detail, reveal the major plot points and twists and turns of the second and third acts or first season using strong, specific visual images that telegraph tone, character, and originality. The synopsis includes the conflict, and climax. In fact, if you describe a visual moment within each act or in a TV series over the course of the first season, that further defines a plot point, character, conflict, tone or all the above, then the listener begins to “see” your movie or series in their head. Film and TV are first and foremost a visual storytelling medium.

Always deal in specifics without getting lost in the details.

Set the pace. If your synopsis zings so will your script/the season. A confusing and meandering synopsis often reveals problems within the script or episodic unfoldment. It is possible to present a complicated story in an uncomplicated way – this is key. Don’t try to cram in too many details, as this is generally the first time your audience has heard the story. They can only take in so much. If your audience is confused now, they won’t bother to read the script. Remember, it’s an index card, not a thesis that you’re presenting.

It is important also that you do not attempt to subtly alter the narrative so that it works for the pitch – this misleads and could breakdown the trust between you and the decision maker.

For documentary, be sure to also indicate the balance of narration (or not), recreations, experts, etc. How do we enter the film? Who draws us in?

6. The Cut Line or Tagline

Generally, 9 to 12 words, the cut line is a marketing tool to seduce/hook the audience. It is like a sound bite – snappy, memorable, and repeatable. Used mostly on posters, it can also be a terrific way to grab someone’s attention in a very short conversation. It creates a feeling, sets the tone, and often reveals the intended genre and audience.

7. Unique Qualifications

As there are many projects out there that have been made or will soon be made, it is key to the pitch that you identify clearly and specifically what is unique and different about your film or series. Because you have done your research, you know what sets your project apart from all others that deal in similar themes or topics. Some people refer to these as your “unique selling point(s)” or “package of pluses”. It could be your access to or treatment of the material, your team, your personal story that connects you to the material etc. These standout elements are key to your pitch.

8. The Property

It is important for your audience to know if your work is an original idea, if it's from some other source such as a book, or play, or if it is inspired by a true story – all of which can be an asset. It is also very important to indicate early on that you have the necessary rights and access to the material required to tell your story. In documentary, commissioning editors want to know what is original/different in your presentation of the material; what access you offer that their audiences have not seen before.

Before you go into the Pitch, figure out your most feared questions and have strong answers.

9. Transmedia and Multiplatform Worlds

Although not all projects are suitable for this, with the ever-evolving forms of delivery from webisodes to apps, to alternate reality games, to live performance events that can extend the life of your project and the reach of your project to wider audiences, it is important that these elements and specific possibilities, if suited to your material, are a part of your package. If this is not your area of expertise, then your pitch should include concepts for multiplatform and/or transmedia and your plan for execution, either bringing expertise into the team or partnering with a company that will deliver these components. Although this may not come out in the opening pitch unless it is one of your unique selling points, you will need to have this information available to your audience. Are you creating something original? Do the different platforms work in harmony? Is each platform maximizing its unique properties? Is it clear that the platforms support the others? Will you be using the most current techniques?

How do the multimedia components reach new audiences/engage new audiences beyond the traditional platforms?

10. Your Strengths and Credentials

Because you are asking your audience to invest time and money into your project (and you), it's important that you give them a “package of pluses” relevant to your project. They not only want to get a sense of your key credentials, but they also want to get a sense of who you are and what you personally bring to this story. What do you bring to the table that reassures your audience that you should be the one to tell the story and that you have the expertise to make it happen?

The pitch of who you are should not be a chronological presentation of your resume. Take preparation time to determine what information from your resume and your personal life is relevant to the specific story you have chosen to tell. This gives you ownership. Your “package of pluses” should include the key elements that you're bringing to the table: e.g. your personal background, your education, your track record, your awards, your experts, your access, and your team as relevant to the property. Be direct, clear, concise, avoiding excessive detail or tangential information. This is not “bragging”, it is upping the ante as to what you have to offer to reassure your potential “partner” that you are worth their time and investment.

The Meeting

Anticipate the questions, know the answers

Do you know the budget? Why is it three one-hours instead of a one-hour special? Do you have enough experience to pull this off? Don't you feel that we already have enough programs covering this material? What sets your programme apart from all the other procedurals? Figure out what questions you dread most and address them in your preparation. Then, if they should come up, you'll have a thoughtful, considered answer ready in the wings. There is a positive spin for every feared question, but it takes homework to consider all the possibilities.

Your goals for the meeting

Be clear with your audience (and with yourself) what you want from the meeting. Are you looking for advice or marketplace knowledge? Do you need an executive producer, broadcaster, distributor, or development dollars? Do you want specific information on how that person works with new projects and a timeline for your next contact?

Breathe!

Breathing can help you 1) connect to your audience at the very beginning, 2) remember something important, 3) prevent you from running on and on, 4) keep you on track, 5) help your audience relax, 6) help you relax!

A strong opening

Your lead-in should acknowledge your specific audience. You've done the research that will link you to this person – it's a good place to start. Always begin with your "royal flush". Start with the strongest element of your project: the story, your personal connection, your credentials, your lead character, your access. Lead with your strengths.

Stay connected

It is completely acceptable to refer to notes to help you keep on track. It is best to work from bullet points rather than full sentences, however, to avoid reading. Listen and watch your audience reactions. Don't think of the pitch as a performance. Encourage your audience to participate in the conversation with questions, observations, as it allows them to "invest", to become involved.

Keep your opening pitch short

Generally 5 minutes max for feature films 7/8 minutes max for drama series. The longer you talk, the easier it is for them to become disengaged. People tend to respond well if they feel that they are participating in an idea's development and that you are honestly interested in their creative collaboration. Ask relevant questions throughout the conversation/pitch to ensure that they are engaged. Avoid asking questions that can be answered with a simple one-word response.

Listen to questions

Don't get thrown or discouraged by questions. Questions show that they're either interested – or confused! Read the signs. Stop if they're confused and take the time to bring them (and you) back on track. Questions can reveal information that you can incorporate into your next pitch or reveal how you might improve the story. Be sure to answer the questions asked, not the questions you wish were asked.

You're the host

You have to keep the meeting on track and on time. The length of a meeting can vary depending on the amount of time

scheduled. Try to find this out either first thing, or before you go into the meeting to gauge your conversation accordingly. Even if the pitch is going really well, check in with the decision maker to see if they need to wrap up, or possibly

set another meeting. This checking-in can prevent a mtg ending abruptly or inconclusively.

The listener wants not only to get a sense of what you have done, but who you are and what you bring to the project.

The presentation pitch

When you are making your pitch to several broadcasters/commissioning editors at once, rather than engaging in a one-on-one, the ingredients of the Pitch remain the same. The difference is that most times you will not be interrupted when delivering in a public format. Always find out the amount of time allotted for your pitch and tailor the information to fit the time restriction. It is still important (and possible!) that you include all the components mentioned, whether it is a 5-minute pitch or a 10 minute pitch.

The trailer

Use technology when it enhances your pitch, but it should not become the pitch. The audience wants to get to know you and ask you questions. Otherwise you could just send them the trailer or look book. Also, too often technology fails us and everyone is disappointed. So much better NOT to rely on it, so that on those occasions when the WiFi isn't working, your pitch falls apart. Also, ask permission if the decision maker wishes to view it together or if you should send the look book electronically as back up.

For documentaries it is becoming essential to provide a trailer. The trailer should be a maximum of 2-3 minutes in length and the footage should further strengthen the pitch by introducing unique, accessible characters, and possible access to previously unseen material. The trailer should also reflect the premise or theme, and set the overall tone for the finished piece.

The bible

The Development Bible should lay out a teaser, the tone, the characters, the pilot episode, the first season arc, potential for subsequent seasons if relevant, and the team behind it. Also, a good series has a strong central theme or question. For example, for *The Game of Thrones*, the central question is "What price is power?" For *House of Cards*, "What is Truth?". Buyers are looking for a strong POV, a unique voice, a genuine connection to the material.

Closing the meeting

The close of a meeting should be as strong as the beginning. Mentally review your goals to make sure you've covered all the relevant information and that you have the answers to any questions you prepared.

You may even want to quickly sum up the information you were given during the meeting, as you understand it. Don't hesitate to take brief notes. It indicates that you value the information given.



Use technology when it enhances your Pitch. It should not become your Pitch.

Review how to follow up

Find out if there is any other individual within the company with whom you should be in contact or a possible assistant. Ask permission to leave or send a script, first episode, bible or if they would prefer to receive it electronically. Always leave your card and ideally receive theirs. If possible, leave a pitch one-sheet. Don't present the one-sheet at the beginning, as it can be a distraction.

The follow-up or aftercare

This is a world built on relationships and your first pitch meeting begins the process. From here, you want the potential collaboration to grow and develop, if not with this project, then with others in the future. Deliver what you have promised to them in your meeting. Take the time to

send a short note of thanks as follow-up. Everyone appreciates this and it's another reminder of whom you are and what you have to offer.

The One-Sheet

Many broadcasters, distributors, producers etc. prefer to receive a one-sheet in advance of their meeting with you, and many like to receive a one-sheet at your meeting for future quick reference. Always have an extra copy with you, and always call in advance to find out specifically what kind of support material they may wish to see. As everyone may be different in this regard, it's best to be prepared. Also, just a note, never present a one-sheet at the beginning of any meeting as it can distract your audience from connecting with you personally.

The one-sheet should be visually engaging and informative. If you use specific examples or references in the copy of your one-sheet look to using different examples or references in your verbal pitch to reassure your audience that you have a wealth of specifics to draw from. Remember that a pitch on a page shouldn't translate verbatim into your verbal pitch. Most often, our writing styles are very different from verbal delivery.

If, in your conversation, some of the ideas for the project change or evolve from what you have included in your one-sheet, do not leave the existing one-sheet behind, as it is already "out of date". Promise to send an updated version as soon as possible and then be very sure to follow up.

Each one-sheet may vary in its visual presentation but remember that less is more. You want to have lots of white space on the page to invite your audience to read the material. A strong, simple visual always helps. The one-sheet generally includes most, or all, of the following information, (although if you are

a writer looking for a producer, some of this would not be available to you until you have a producer on board):

- Title
- Format
- Season length (for TV)
- Genre
- Budget
- Status to date (\$ and partners committed)
- Intended audience (specifically with children's programming)
- Cutline/Short Synopsis/Long Synopsis
- Key Production Team Credits/Bios
- Contact names and information

You've hit the "Perfect Pitch" when your listener wants to take another meeting with you.

Final Thoughts

If you are shy, find your own style of pitch that you are comfortable with, still incorporating the ingredients that are included in this handout.

No two pitches should be the same because you are pitching to a different person and you are at a different point in your project's development. Keep it fresh and relatable to your specific audience.

The decision maker wants to get to know you, what draws you to the material, how you are thinking about the theme. Generally, they want to get a sense of who you are. This can be equally important to understanding the project, as decisions are often made on instincts and intuition about

those we chose to work with.

Learn from every pitch. As with stories and movies, less is usually more.

Gimmicks rarely work in pitches as the decision

makers you will generally meet with, have seen hundreds if not thousands of pitches. But then again, rules are made to be broken – but the reasons to do this have to be clear.

Remember that the clarity, economy, and effectiveness of your pitch as well as your unique selling points, provide the best tools for your listener to take your project to his/her colleagues to pitch on your behalf.

Many people have asked when they know they've delivered a perfect pitch. It's not necessarily when the person immediately commits to working on your project (almost always there will be more than one person involved in making this decision.) You hit the "perfect pitch" when the person you are speaking with wants to meet with you another time, possibly on this project, but more importantly, because you are a person that they want to work with.

And so, the relationship begins!

