

# **Concept Creation & Program Selection**

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**Concept creation**

## The Reality Of What They Are

- Formatted reality shows are essentially game shows, because there is a specific structure, set rules, and a clear winner.
- What makes them exciting to watch is the fact that they are often clever dramatic social experiments. To truly connect with an audience and have entertainment value in a show, the idea needs to be as fun to watch as it is to participate in.
- Docuseries reality shows allow us to witness life unfold for a person, family, business, or group set within a lifestyle and circumstance that creates entertaining and compelling content.
- The reason viewers tune in is because we have an insatiable appetite for witnessing and being entertained by the human experience.

## **Conceiving & Creating:**

Be Specific in your idea, and try several approaches.

They may be spending time trying to develop the concept internally, while also taking pitches from a handful of producers. Many producers will create two or three variations on the same concept.

And each of those will give you a different result, a different experience as a viewer, and therefore they are considered by any executive taking stock- different shows. So don't be afraid to work on several shows within the same theme. It can only increase your chance of making a sale.

### **Make It Marketable:**

Titles are very important. They should roll off the tongue easily, provoke conversations, and simply tell you exactly what you're going to be watching.

## How To Write & Pitch A TV Show Idea

### The Logline:

- Whether you're pitching reality shows, docuseries', game show formats, or drama series', the most critical aspect of the pitch is the "Logline".
- It's the short pitch that sells your series. It's the one-liner and shorthand that a TV development executive uses to sell it to her boss at the production company, and that her boss uses to sell it to the network executive.
- Ultimately it is that core "idea" that is used to market the show to viewers. We'll break down this clever and critical tool for you further in this article.

## The Pitch Treatment:

- Supporting that core idea should be a written pitch treatment that details all of the unique and original aspects of your concept as they would play out in the proposed show.
- This bolsters the originality of your pitch, and helps protect it as an intellectual property.
- "Ideas" are protected under copyright law only when there is a unique and original expression of them. "stock ideas" that are vague and generalized with no original creation of proposed content in a pitch cannot be protected. S
- o it pays to roll up your sleeves and get creative and clever in your premise, your plot, your characters, and proposed scenarios and format.
- In this guide, we'll dive into the framework and strategy for writing a compelling pitch that will communicate the potential of your TV script or concept to producers.

3 Key Components that sell your TV series idea or script, and how they fuel the potential of your pitch:

## 1. Title

First, let's talk **TITLE**. Unlike film titles that may be more ambiguous to serve some underlying theme or the character's plight, television is a title driven medium unlike any other. It's the first message delivered to viewers to provoke interest. It's often a play on words, and rolls easily off the tongue. A title can be a great sales tool if it hints at a subject we haven't seen before and inspires the imagination, allowing the executive to see the potential for the series.

## 2. **Logline**

A **LOGLINE** is a one or two sentence description in a pitch that tells the basic premise and purpose of a TV show idea. Loglines for the sake of pitching a project are similar to a TV Guide description of a show, but more specific in describing the concept of the program. This is the catalyst for increasing the odds of selling a script or idea for a series.



### **3. Synopsis / Treatment**

This is a detailed outline, typically 3 to 10 pages, depending on the genre, that tells the story of your series and concept as it plays out in both the pilot episode, and over the arc of the series. It will include a description of the "world" and premise of the series, the plight of your main character(s), and sample episode storylines. The content varies by genre, but we'll break it into two main categories:

**Scripted Series** - The logline has explained the main premise and plight of your protagonist, and now this is where you drill in and bring the world their world to life. The key is to not be so detailed that it bogs down the reader, but to hit on all of the most critical beats in the episode or season you are detailing. This may include an outline of the Pilot episode (whether or not you have a script), an outline of a first season arc so we can see how the series evolves, and what the specific episode summaries are. Our article [How-To-Pitch-A-TV-Show-Pilot-Script.asp](#) provides a full view of writing pitch treatments for scripted series.

**Unscripted** - While the logline should detail the set-up or subject that is the focus of the series, when you dig in to write the synopsis you'll most likely be writing what we'll "potentially" or "ideally" witness in the series. Since much of these series' are character focused, a majority of your synopsis should cover the main characters lives, habits, passions, pursuits, and conflicts.

## **Title of Show:**

**Logline:** 1 or 2 sentence description of your concept. Similar to what you might see in TV Guide or on a poster for a movie, but a bit more descriptive of content.

**Synopsis:** A detailed description of your show as we would see it on TV. Usually 1 to 3 pages in length. It's important to be efficient with your descriptions, yet give enough information to provoke interest of the reader. The golden rule: Show the reader what we are watching-

# Program Selection

## **Identify the Purpose of the Production**

1. This is the most important step: *Clearly identify the production's goals and purposes.*

If there is no clear agreement on the goals and purposes of a production, it will be impossible to evaluate its success. (How will you know if you've arrived at your destination, if you didn't know where you were going in the first place?)

Is the purpose to instruct, inform, or entertain -- or maybe to generate feelings of pride or express a social, religious, or political need? Is the real purpose to create a desire in the audience to take some action?

The goal of commercial broadcasting is an economic one, or to hold the interest of an audience through an exposure to the commercials.

Most productions have more than one goal. We'll elaborate on some of these later.

## **Analyze Your Target Audience**

**2.** Next, *identify and analyze your target audience.*

Based on such things as age, sex, socioeconomic status and educational level, program content preferences will differ. These preferences are also different in various regions of the United States (e.g., North, South, urban, rural).

## Check Out Similar Productions

3. *Check out similar productions from the past.* If you're going to make mistakes, at least make new ones.

Ask yourself some questions: How will your proposed production differ

from previous successful and unsuccessful efforts by others?

Why did they work; or, maybe more importantly, why didn't they?

Of course, since production styles change rapidly, you need to take into consideration differences in time, locations, and audiences.

[this link](#) will take you to more information on the success and failure of TV programs.

## **Determine the Basic Value of Your Production**

4. Next, *determine the overall value of the production to a sponsor or underwriter.*

Obviously, underwriters and advertisers want something in return for their investment. For this, you'll need to ask yourself some questions. First, what is the probable size of the audience? In determining this, you must know if your show will be a one-shot presentation or if you can recoup production expenses over time by presenting the show to other audiences.



Generally, the larger the potential audience the more marketable a production will be to an underwriter or advertiser.

**At** the same time, simple numbers don't tell the full story.

Let's say an advertiser has a product designed for young people -- athletic shoes or designer jeans. In this case, a production that draws a large percentage of this age group will be more valuable than a production that has a larger overall audience, but a lower percentage of young people.

Broadcasters have canceled many TV series, *not* because they had a small audience, but because they had the *wrong* audience (the wrong demographics).

You'll always want to balance the potential value of a production to an advertiser or underwriter with the projected cost of producing and presenting the production.

If the costs exceed the benefits, you have a problem!

In commercial television, the return on investment is generally in the form of increased sales and profits. But it may take other forms, such as the expected moral, political, spiritual, or public relations benefit derived from the program.

## **Develop a Treatment or Production Proposal**

**5. Next, *put it down on paper.*** You'll recall that earlier we talked about treatments and program proposals (written summaries of what you propose to do).

After the program proposal or treatment is approved, the next step is to write and submit a full script.

It will be at this point that any remaining research on the content will be commissioned. For example, if the script calls for someone watching TV in a 1960s period piece (a production that takes place during an earlier era or period), you should check on the television shows broadcast at that time.

The first version of a script is normally followed by numerous revisions.

Throughout the rewriting process, a number of **story conferences** or **script conferences** typically take place. During these sessions audience appeal, pace, and problems with special interest groups, etc., are discussed.

If it's an institutional production, you'll review the production's goals and pose questions about the most effective ways to present ideas. If the director is on board at this time, he or she should be part of these conferences.

**Finally**, a script version emerges that is (we can hope) acceptable to everyone. Even this version, however, may not be final. In some instances, revisions continue right up to the time the scenes are shot.

Typically, in a dramatic film production each new script version is issued on a different color paper so that the cast and crew won't confuse them with earlier versions.

Depending on the production, you may want to develop a *storyboard*.

A **storyboard** consists of drawings of key scenes with corresponding notes on elements such as dialogue, sound effects, and music.

Note the simple hand drawn storyboard here that shows the audio which will correspond to specific scenes. More commonly, software programs help create storyboards.

## **Develop a Production Schedule**

**6. Next, draw up a tentative schedule.**

Generally, broadcast or distribution deadlines will dictate the production schedule (the written timetable listing the time allotted for each production step).

This will also show you when the various production elements will need to be ready.

Not planning things out carefully might cause you to miss a critical deadline, possibly even rendering the production useless.

## **Select Key Production Personnel**

**7.** *Bring on board the remaining above-the-line production personnel.* In addition to the producer and writer, above-the-line personnel include the production manager, director and, in general, key creative team members. Below-the-line personnel, generally assigned later, include the technical staff.

## Decide On Locations

8. If you're not shooting in the studio, *decide on key locations*.

In a major production, such as the type we are outlining in this discussion, you will hire a **location scout** or **location manager** to find and coordinate the use of the locations suggested by the script.

Although it might be easier to shoot in a TV studio, it's been shown that audiences like the authenticity of "real" Locations, especially in dramatic productions.

Most major cities encourage TV and film production and maintain *film commissions* that supply photos and videotapes of interesting shooting locations in their area. They'll also provide information on usage fees and the names of people to contact.

It's often necessary to make changes in the on-location settings. For instance, rooms may have to be repainted or redecorated and visible signs covered or changed.

## **Decide On Talent, Wardrobe and Sets**

**9.** Next, you'll want to *make some decisions on talent, wardrobe (costuming) and sets.*

Depending on the type of production, auditions may take place at this point as part of the casting process (selecting people for the various roles). The success of dramatic productions rely heavily on this step.

Once this is completed, you'll negotiate and sign contracts.

If you're lucky enough to afford well-known actors, you'll probably have decided on them early in the preproduction process.

Once you decide on the talent, you can begin wardrobe selection. These are suggested by the script, coordinated with the look of the sets and locations, and ultimately approved by the producer.



**A**fter a set designer is hired, he or she will review the script, possibly do ¥ research, and then discuss initial ideas with the producer and director. Once there's agreement, sketches of the sets can be made for final approval before actual set construction starts -- if there *is* any construction. Today, some sets exist only in computers and the actors are ¥ electronically inserted into them. If this is the case, the set sketches will be given to a computer artist.

You can then schedule the table reading and the rehearsals, including the final dress rehearsal. In the *table reading* the talent in dramatic productions reads through the full script -- generally, out loud while everyone sits around a table -- to iron out any dialogue or script problems.

Once the sets are finished, blocking (establishing the positioning of sets, furniture, cameras, actors, etc.) the dress rehearsals can get underway.

## **Decide on the Remaining Production Personnel**

**10.** With the foregoing locked in you can *make decisions on the remaining staff and production needs*. Then you are ready to arrange for key technical personnel, equipment, and facilities, including the possible rental of needed equipment.

At this point you can also arrange for transportation, catering (food and refreshment trucks) and on-location accommodations (for any overnight stays).

Unions, which may be involved, often set minimum standards for transportation, as well as the quality of meals and accommodations. Union contracts also cover job descriptions, specific crew responsibilities and working hours, including graduated pay increases for overtime hours.

## **Obtain Permits, Insurance, Clearances**

**11.** In major U.S. cities and in many foreign countries it's not possible just go to the location of your choice, set up your equipment and start filming. (Although *film* will probably not be used, this is another of those terms that continues after its literal meaning has passed into history.) Except for spot news and short documentary segments, for major productions you must *arrange access permits, licenses, security bonds, and insurance policies.*

Many semipublic interior locations, such as shopping malls, require filming permits. (Yes, these things do get complicated!)

Depending on the nature of the production, *liability insurance* and *security bonds* may be necessary because accidents can happen that can be directly or indirectly attributed to the production -- someone tripping over a cable, or whatever.

In some locations the controlling agency will limit exterior production to certain areas and specific hours. In a street scene where traffic will be affected you may need to arrange for police officers.

**We** also include in this category a wide variety of *clearances* ranging from permission to use prerecorded music to reserving satellite time to transmit the production back to a station or production facility. If you can't immediately obtain clearance, you'll need time to explore alternatives.

Are you beginning to see why list of credits in films and TV programs is so long?

## **Select Video Inserts, Still Photos, and Graphics**

**12.** *Arrange to shoot or acquire video and film inserts, still photos, and graphics.*

To reduce production costs you will want to check out existing **stock footage** in film and video libraries around the country. This is generally background footage, such as general exterior scenes of an area that can be edited into the production.

If suitable footage is not available or does not meet the needs of the production, you may need to hire a second unit to produce needed segments.

**Second unit** work is production done away from the main location by a separate production crew and generally does not involve the principal talent.

If part of a dramatic production calls for shots of a specific building in Cleveland, for example, a second unit can shoot the necessary exteriors in Cleveland while the primary unit works in Southern California where the actors are based.

**A**s an example, the TV series, *Charmed*, which ran for seven years, was about three good witches. It supposedly took place in San Francisco.

However, the actors and primary production facilities were in Los Angeles, so the San Francisco city scenes were shot by a second unit in San Francisco and then edited into the rest of the production. Editing made it possible to smoothly weave together scenes that were filmed 400 miles apart.

To make it more challenging the San Francisco house exteriors featured in every episode were of an old house located in a section of Los Angeles while the supposed interiors of that same house were filmed in a studio miles away.



## **Begin Rehearsals and Shooting**

**13.**      *Start*      *rehearsing*      *and*  
*shooting.* Depending on the type of production, rehearsals may take place either minutes or days before the actual shooting.

Productions shot live-on-tape (without stopping, except for major problems -- whether recorded on videotape or another medium) need to be completely rehearsed before recording starts. This includes early walk-through rehearsals, camera rehearsals, and one or more dress rehearsals.

Productions that are shot single-camera, film-style (to be covered later) are rehearsed and recorded one scene at a time.

## **Begin Editing Phase**

**14.** After shooting is completed, the producer, director, and video recording editor *review the footage and start to make editing decisions.*

Although the distinction has become blurred with the latest digital advances, editing has been  $\neq$  done in two distinct phases: online and offline.

Offline editing generally uses a low-resolution copy of the original taped footage that contains time-code number references to specific points in the original footage. Thus, when this is edited in preliminary post-production phases, the original footage is not altered.

In *online editing* the original footage is used to make the final edited version of the production. Since the latter is much faster it is preferred for news work.

During the final editing phase, sound sweetening (enhancing), color balancing, and visual effects are added.

**B**ecause editing is so important to the creative process, we're going to devote several later chapters to the subject. If all these terms and procedures sound a bit intimidating right now, don't worry; we'll explain them in more detail later.

## **Do Postproduction Follow-Up**

**15.** Although most of the production crew will conclude their work by the time production wraps (finishes), some follow-up work generally needs to be completed.

Included is totaling up financial statements, paying the final bills, and determining the production's success (or failure). *Ratings* indicate success levels in broadcast television.

In institutional television success may be determined by testing, program evaluations and viewer feedback.

Speaking of ratings -- those numbers often spell the life and death of TV programs.