



7 BIGGEST TV Show Pitching Mistakes

By Mark and Jeanne Simon

“Hi from Jeanne and Mark Simon - We've learned the hard way what NOT to do in a pitch. We've worked in the entertainment industry for over 40 cumulative years, given and received hundreds of pitches and interviewed numerous top television network decision makers. We wish we had stumbled across an article like this when we started to pitch our shows. Enjoy!”



Mistake #1 - The Groaner

We dare you to open a pitch to network executives with any one of the following:

- "It will make us all millions!"
- "There's never been a show like it in the history of TV!"
- "It will be bigger than American Idol!"

The sounds you'll hear will be groans of despair from pitch-weary execs who have heard these phrases so often their ears will bleed. We strongly suggest you hold the sizzle until last, or not at all, and lead with what your show is.

The strongest and most compelling way to engage your listener is with a story that might be told by your show that gets them to feel something. This is the way Hollywood insiders, like super- producer Mark Burnett, pitches his shows - with a story.

Mistake #2 – Crash and Burn

We know this next bit of advice will sound crazy, but here it goes - don't memorize your pitch. We've done it and, trust us, it doesn't work. You'll spend way too much time to get every word, pause, and gesture just right only to have it work against you.

The big meeting comes and you get half way through your pitch when the exec asks a question, or a phone rings, or someone comes into the room. Your brain registers ERROR and your lips freeze. You have officially crashed...and burned... and to get going again you have to reboot! Nothing will suck the life out of a pitch than having to start over.

Think of a pitch as a two-way give-and-take rather than a one-way download from you. You'll know a pitch is going well when the execs care enough to make suggestions or ask questions.



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Mistake #3 - Bait and Switch

Execs assume that when they schedule a pitch meeting with you that you'll be trying to sell them a show. All too often though, pitchers attempt to WOW execs with how many stuffed animals, lunch boxes, or back packs they claim the show will sell before the execs are sold on the show.

Pull a bait and switch by pitching merchandise before the concept and you'll not like the consequences. You'll look like a complete amateur. You will not sell your show. You will have killed any future chances of pitching to these people ever again.

Networks have entire departments whose prime directive is to make massive amounts of money with merchandise once a show has a following. Leave it to the professionals.

Mistake #4 - Ignorance is Not Bliss

You'd be surprised how many people pitch shows to networks while they watch few shows, if any, on that very network. Woe to the person who pitches a show that is either just like a show that a network is currently airing or one that in no way fits within the network brand.

Network execs are intimately familiar with their own network's programming and nearly as equally familiar with the shows on competing channels. You are not expected to be as well informed as they are, but you will score big points if you can pinpoint the exact spot in a network line up for your show and be able to explain why your show is different, backed up by examples of competing shows.

Mike Moon, Vice President , Animation Development for Disney Channel and Jetix, had worked on the Cartoon Network series *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends*. A producer pitched Moon a show called *A Home for Abandoned and Forgotten Imaginary Friends*. Needless to say, that pitch didn't go too far and Moon was not too eager to hear another pitch from that producer.

Mistake #5 - Diva Disaster

A good pitch can go bad quickly when you won't even consider a suggestion from an exec. Don't let a death grip on the details of your concept make you come across like a difficult diva.

In a pitch, almost anything should be up for negotiation within limits. Why not consider a female host or a change in location from Hawaii to Miami? If the execs want to change your show from a feel-good show about how little people have lives too, to mud-wrestling midgets, then you may want to shop it elsewhere.



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Mistake #6 - Fatal Error

The confidence you have about your show will be infectious in a pitch, but tearing down the shows of the very network you pitch...is sure to be fatal.

Linda Simensky, PBS Kids V.P. of Development, has had her fill of critical creatives. She told us about one of her more memorable encounters.

"This other producer started trashing all our programs while explaining how his show was going to save our network because all of our other shows were crap. Sure, that completely makes me want to work with him," said Simensky.

The would-be savior was escorted out of the building by security and Linda made sure he was blackballed by all other networks as well. Ouch!

Mistake #7 - Deer in the Headlights

You make the pitch and the networks like it, they really like it. They ask you to leave behind your treatment. If your response is the "what-ment?" you and your show are cancelled before anyone sees the first episode.

You need different tools to pitch each different genre of TV: reality, animation, sit-com, drama, sci-fi, or game show. When you pitch with these tools, and they've been professionally executed, you'll be confident the execs will be impressed and you could be well on your way to signing a contract.

You Never Get a Second Chance at a First Impression

Of course you want every pitch to be a winner. You also want to have an open door to be able to go back and pitch other ideas to the same executives. A burned bridge destroys the chances of not only your current idea, but your future ones as well.

In conclusion, a great pitch is all about the story. Let your enthusiasm and passion sweep listeners up for a ride they'll never want to end.

Are you ready to move forward with your show?

Sell Your TV Concept Now, Inc is the place for expert guidance and resources for those who are serious about selling their TV show ideas. Visit our website and get all the details about our TV Concept Evaluations and how to move forward with your idea.