



hotdocs
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Hot Docs Pitching Tool



RECLAIMING YOUR PITCH

Pitching connotes a hard-sell or a Hollywood Studio meeting. Let's reclaim it simply as a way of talking about your project in an engaging and irresistible way. Pitching in front of a community of international broadcasters, financiers, and other industry experts can be nerve wracking and very few people are naturally good at it, so the more you practice and work at it, the easier – and better – it will get. Strength and success come from calmness and trust in your vision. In preparation for the Hot Docs Forum or any pitching experience, from cocktail party to a one on one meeting, we assembled a few exercises to direct your energy and focus to this unique practice.

KNOW YOUR PROJECT

Ask yourself:

- WHY (again and again). Why are you making this film? What is my film really about? Why does my film matter? Who is my audience and why should they care about my film?
- What is unique about this story? Identify your strengths and know your weaknesses. Be honest.
- Be able to defend every aspect of your project: Why here? Why now? Why like this, in this format, made in this way?
- Identify your audience: Is there a market for this? Where is that market? What do they look like? If made commercially or independently, how do I get people to watch my film?
- Why do you want the support of particular funders? How will your project truly benefit from this support?

Be proactive:

- How do you engage communities, third sector (NGO, foundations, charities, funds)?
- Educate yourself on intellectual property and international rights, pre-negotiations.

Overall, you want to identify how your project fits into the broader world of documentary production, interactivity, engagement, and distribution.

The more you know about the lifecycle of your entire project, the more you will instill confidence in those that can provide support.

THE LANDSCAPE

Pitches should be tailored to specific situations. Whether the person you're speaking with can finance the project, advise you, or introduce you to others...and whether you're in a scheduled meeting, a buffet line, or at a party, will determine your style and approach. Tailor your pitch to the person and the circumstance by doing your research and being sensitive to the context

You can best prepare for this by getting to know the buyers, funds, foundations, channel spots and the places that your film can find support. Informing yourself of the needs of Decision Makers and specifically their timeslots, slates, program schedules, and target groups.

Know the industry better than they do. If you can tell a buyer where your film will fit on their schedule and how it will draw an audience, it will be harder for them not to give you a deal.

Practice and learn to adapt your story to each Decision Maker by asking yourself:

- Who am I pitching to? What kind of pitch is this –for Finance? Support?
- What am I trying to achieve through this particular pitch?
- What does my pitchee have at stake (as a broadcaster, funder, foundation etc.)? What do they have to gain or lose? Why should they care? Why should their audience care?

Listen and react, as you talk to them, be present. Watch and listen for the way they are reacting to you, and adjust accordingly. No pitch will be exactly the same for two different buyers.

Best Practice

- Read industry trades: Playback, Realscreen, Broadcast Now, Variety, Hollywood Reporter, Indiewire World Screen, industry blogs etc.
- Attend industry conferences, markets, panels, and sessions. Talk to colleagues and other filmmakers to gather information and advice.
- Follow up on meetings and follow through on your promises.

THE DELIVERY

Knowing your project and the industry landscape goes hand in hand with speaking with self-assurance and confidence. Buyers want to feel like you are in control of your idea, and you can handle its execution. If you speak as if it's inevitable, others will want to be a part of it.

Remember to start your pitch with a hook! Reel us in; make us want more. Pitching is about creating a sense of excitement and desire in the listener. You are seducing them with an idea. You need them to walk out of the meeting not wanting to let you or your film go. The goal is to get the listener interested in taking the next step.

Most pitching is actually conversational, so relax into it, be yourself. Prepare a few ways to get into your pitch so you can seamlessly work it into a conversation. Of course, make sure the person has time (even when it's only a minute or two) and don't corner, stalk, or push.

Speak clearly and explain every thought (your audience does not know your film as well as you do!).

Have fun. No matter how nervous you may be, try to enjoy the pitch. If you are relaxed and enjoying it, they are more likely to enjoy it too.

Convey what you love. If you don't love this project, how will anyone else? Tap into your passion--what about this film authentically excites you or moves you? Why have you pursued it, spent time and effort on it? Your enthusiasm will be inspiring and infectious.

Remember: The people you are meeting are not just "buying" into your work; they are buying into you as a person, as a creator, and as an artist. They are buying into an idea and a feeling. The best way to pitch is to be passionate about your work, knowledgeable of the market, and prepared to engage.

THE GOODS

Know the ESSENCE of your project and speak directly to that. This is not about synopsising the plot, but about crystallizing the basic emotional power, overarching themes, and drama. It's the "big beautiful idea" you are trying to express, the engine of the film, or a big question you are asking. Make us feel that you understand the raw, primal power of the story, topic, and characters.

When telling the story of the film, avoid simply recounting the plot, blow by blow, and burying what's compelling under too much detail. Whet our appetites; don't feed us. Tell the broader narrative beats, and give us a sense of the main characters and the "world" of the film. Allow us to see that you understand the craft of storytelling and structure as well as the characters.

Capitalize on the pedigree of your project—elements that elevate, strengthen, or make it special. These can be festival connection, your unique relationship to the material, your director's achievements, relevance of the project in the contemporary world, access to a subject or performer, underlying rights, aesthetic approach etc. This is often a great place to start or end the pitch.

Mention the POV, tone, scope, genre, location or visual style of the film to orient your listener.

If a pitch were a work of literature, it would be a short story, perhaps a poem or haiku, but not a novel. Every phrase, word, and image must contribute in a precise way to the whole. Choose language that is ***active, visual and evocative***. There should be no extraneous material, no tangents, no "sort-ofs," "kind-ofs," or "uhms." Tight, tight, tight.

In a longer conversation that includes a discussion of the film's potential in the marketplace, let your buyer know you understand who your target audience is—ie. who will want to see this film and how you will reach them. Think carefully about the relationship between your budget and potential revenues, and be ready to defend the budget as realistic *according to the realities of the marketplace*. You may also want to find an appropriate comparison to another film that recently performed well.

Don't forget The Ask. What are you actually looking for? Is this pitch for investment, funding, support, or a potential co-production? Be clear with what you want and how you will use it.