



## Speed dating pitching

by Julian Friedmann

### THE PITCHING BRIEF

At the SWF in Cheltenham this year you have been selected to have speed dating meetings with producers and/or agents. These meetings last only 5 minutes. Ideally you don't want to waste any of that time so we would like to make some suggestions:

1. Familiarise yourself with the agents and producers you are meeting by reading their profiles prepared for you. These can be seen on the SWF website. You don't want to use any of your 5 minutes asking your 'date' what they do, what they are interested in and so on. Know as much about them as you can find out. See their movies, visit their websites before you get to Cheltenham. Have a print out of the home page of their website with you at the meeting. Show them you are a pro and have prepared for this time with them. They are giving their time voluntarily. Show them you appreciate it.
2. Have a business card ready to give them (and collect one in return).
3. Do not bring piles of scripts: if they express interest in a project ask if you can send it by email or post. It is OK to have a single sheet of paper with a brief CV, your contact details and a brief pitch of your project/s.
4. Don't try to pitch too many projects. The producers and agents cannot take in so much information: use the 5 minutes to get them to want to see you again. That is a result.
5. Your pitch should be short – maximum 60 seconds. With the greetings and exchange of cards that could give you time to pitch 2 projects and get a brief response.

### How to prepare for a 60 second pitch.

Prepare your pitches **in writing beforehand**. This is a very advantageous form of preparation, even if you know the project extremely well, which you should if you are about to write the script or have written the script. It is always advisable to think about **how** to pitch a project before you have written it; you can ensure that the essence of it – or the theme or concept – is properly embodied in it when you do come to write it. Surprisingly this is often not the case in finished scripts.

Pitching involves selecting carefully what to say, and usually selecting as little information as you can make an impact with. Most people seem to think that more information is better than less, because that way they can get everything into their pitch. In fact, a *teaser* works more effectively, because you raise the interest of the

listener who then **wants to know more**. There is a subtle change in the relationship between listener and pitcher, and the pitcher is no longer the supplicant.

Pitching - which is simply the verbal presentation of information about your project - is a skill that can be learned and practised. The 'written' pitch is probably the best way of preparing for the verbal pitch. If you have prepared a couple of short versions of a presentation of your project – whether a feature or TV movie, an original series or even an episode of an existing series - you will find it easier to make a verbal pitch with greater confidence. You will also have a choice - to offer the one sentence or one paragraph version!

Ideally you prepare three separate versions of your project. In each of the three versions it is more important to make the reader of the document interested in your story **than it is to tell the story**. However, in a full one page-version you will effectively be telling the whole story, so you need to find a way of telling it that will intrigue the listener or reader of the page, and you need to include the ending.

In other words, you need to communicate **what sort of story** it is in such a way that the person reading your document (or listening to your pitch) will want to know more. You actually want them to ask you to tell them more about it. So don't try to get everything into the initial description; *keep some of the ammunition for later*.

In a 5 minute speed date, if they want to know more, either offer them a one-page document on the project, or ask if they would like you to email it to them. If you have your computer or BlackBerry, have the attachment ready and email it within the hour. That usually impresses people.

**The three versions should be as follows (always write the longest one first):**

**1. One-liner.**

Describe the kind of programme/film/story/series/novel in one sentence only. For example, "COLD FEET is about three couples who are close friends, who are at different stages of their relationships or marriages, and who confide so much in each other that misunderstandings and betrayals become inevitable." (Or something like that but no longer. This one sentence is almost a paragraph.)

**2. One paragraph.**

Here you can expand into several sentences, but do not take more than five lines.

**3. One page.**

In some ways telling the story in up to one page can be more difficult. You have so much more freedom, but avoid being seduced by the luxury of so many words. Nothing should be on this page unless it is immediately understandable and furthers both the telling of the story **and** the interest of the reader.

It is important that you write the longest version of your pitch documents first, then attempt to find the essence of the story you have described for the shorter versions. Frequently the process of reducing to just a few words of what a story is really about

leads to the discovery that the story perhaps is not being told in the best possible way. For this reason alone pitching is a very useful exercise which writers should do for themselves before they start writing the script, and even if they are not actually going to have to pitch the project at all.

Remember too that it is dangerous to oversell; clarity is essential; because you may know the story inside out, you may not realise that someone who does not will have trouble following your abbreviated description. Get someone else to read your written pitches.

It is difficult to convey passion in a written pitch. However, it is very important to do so in a verbal pitch' which is why eye contact is so important. You should **not** have your written pitch in front of you when making your verbal pitch. Eyes down means you are not making contact.

If you must have some notes have a few (no more than 5) bullet points just to remind yourself of the things you want to discuss in the 5 minutes. Do remember that you will almost certainly want different points for different 'dates' – after all different agents and different producers will have different requirements. Prepare for each one separately and always try to say something complimentary about their productions or one of their clients (in the case of an agent).

Once you have mastered the aspects of pitching which are easy to learn, you should no longer be nervous about making verbal pitches, and your pitches should become much more effective. Since you never know when you might bump into a useful industry contact, having the ability and confidence to talk professionally in brief about your work will give you an important advantage.

If you write well, don't let yourself down because you don't know how to sell yourself and what you write. Apart from that, pitching is actually both easy and fun!

Fuller details on how to pitch are available from the chapter LIFE'S A PITCH! in my book HOW TO MAKE MONEY SCRIPTWRITING (Intellect Books).