

Give TV Producers Lead Time

Written by Business News

Even for the best publicists, booking a client onto a talk show on a day's notice is a rarity. Just as great visuals are important when pitching TV producers for an interview, so too is providing leeway to consider your proposal. Giving the producer — and yourself — enough lead time to schedule an interview which will coincide with your event or publicity tour will help meet those objectives, and create a positive rapport for future dealings.



“You may have a great upcoming event, but there is little that can be done to book an interview if you start contacting talk shows just days before it happens,” says Brad Matson, producer of Breakfast Television, Toronto’s most watched morning program. “If you make a ton of calls [to show producers] hoping to change our minds, you’ll come across as pushy and unprofessional. You will only kill your chances for an interview in the future.”

Lead time can be viewed as good manners in media relations, demonstrating courtesy when courting TV producers. Notifying a local talk show a month before your event, followed by a handful of telephone calls spread over several weeks, will be an appreciated interaction. It allows producers time to review your press kit, ask for clarifications, and make requests for supporting information.

Ideally, the amount of lead time required should be determined before setting the event or tour date. The publicist should communicate this need to the client, staff, and event/tour management. Media follow-up time should then be integrated into the event plan, leading to a schedule date(s).

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As coverage and format varies, determining lead time for an interview is ultimately a judgment call, aided by research on producer preferences. Assuming your proposal has merit, daily programs featuring several guests may require weeks or months to schedule. Producers of weekly news magazines and special interest shows may set the season's editorial calendar during the preceding summer, requiring PR agents to propose profile interviews at that time, and follow-up throughout the year.

On the other hand, local news producers may need roughly a week's notice, as decisions for coverage of events and happenings is generally not made until that on-air date.

"The key is conciseness. For an interview of five-minutes or less, you should be able to pitch it in one telephone call," says B.J. DelConte supervising producer, CablePulse 24 (CP24), a Canadian cable news network. "If you can do that, we [CP24] can usually book your client within days."

Wrestling with lead time issues is not limited to novice publicists. Matson says sometimes big guns make mistakes too due to lack of common sense.

"Some PR agencies contact us in January for interviews they want to schedule in May," he says. "In between, I will deal with a 1,000+ press kits and story proposals. It is highly unlikely I will remember that pitch [as top-of-mind] when the time comes."

When interview space is at a premium, giving lead time may buy you options. For instance, agreeing to a stand-by interview may significantly increase your chances for coverage.

"You may not be the first choice for an interview at that moment, but if a guest cancels you will most likely be the first person producers think of when looking for replacements," Matson says.

As interview dates are not carved in stone, lead time can help keep the ones you have lined-up. If a daily talk show schedules your interview for a specific date, keep that same block of time clear the day before and after. If the producer calls you in the last minute to reschedule, you will not lose the opportunity for an immediate booking, and may gain a favor in hand by helping

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them out of a tight situation.

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