

Getting a programme on the air

Treatment

A production starts with a Treatment. This is a succinct description of what the programme is trying to show, how it will be shown, and who it is aimed at. A TV treatment should be no longer than one page and include the vital statistics of the show. The audience need to be defined –prime time, children, daytime, early evening, late night. The presenter and/or any well known contributors must be included, and the style of the show - studio, all location, video diary, or a genre. Suggest a budget.

EXAMPLE OF A TREATMENT

Programme: TO BE THE BEST

Duration: 1 X 25 minutes

Independent production suitable for mid evening on BBC2 or Channel

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Format: Single camera shot on location on DV. Extensive postproduction.

Audience: Sports audience, but also of interest to a general audience interested in how the mind works, and people who take part in any sporting activity – from bowls to sand yachting, from football to lacrosse

Presenter: Charismatic Olympic gold medallist in rowing for Great Britain.

Aim : The aim of the series is to explore in depth the mental, and psychological training systems used by top sports people. The advice, help and training methods used would be analysed and interpreted for armchair viewers.

Resumé: Top sportsmen and team coaches use sports psychologists, or employ a variety of mental techniques including meditation, visualisation and cognitive techniques to improve sporting performance. How do these techniques work, and do they work? The programme explains and explores with a light touch using new modern in depth research from a leading UK university.

Suggested Elements: The programme will interview a wide range of sports psychologists and other practitioners, and will test their theories. Top athletes, footballers, rugby players and cricketers have agreed to take part. A televisual young professor, who has tested many of these techniques, leads the university research team. She will present their research and explain their results.

Using some animation the programme will show how the mind works in relation to specific techniques.

Dynamic presenter, charismatic contributors and a firm public service remit within the field of sports science. A programme that will interest everyone who watched the Olympics, especially the rowing.

Cost: average filming days for a 25 minute programme. Some animation. Average to low budget for a mid evening programme.

(END OF TREATMENT)

The treatment will be assessed by a commissioning editor or executive producer. If it is liked and thought suitable for the channel and the time slot the producer will be asked to attend a number of meetings. If all goes well the show will be commissioned and given a budget. It is relatively unusual for a one off programme to be commissioned, The producer may go to an independent company who could take a bundle of similar programmes to a commissioning editor and offer a series of science based programmes to the channel.

Production team

For an independent factual programme as in the example a team will be assembled by the producer. There is a researcher/PA, and an assistant producer who will also direct some of the programmes.

Script

The next stage is to write a shooting script, or an expanded running order that will give some shape to each programme. Scripts for factual programmes evolve throughout the production. What might start as a list of interviewees and locations will probably end up as a précis of the content of the interviews linked by pieces to camera, script for graphics and commentary. It is likely to be too long and will have to be adjusted for time in the edit.

Recce

Recce comes from the French word reconnaissance and means a survey. This is the stage where you know what you want to film, and now need to finalise the locations

or discover new relevant ones. The recce is linked to the research, and often done at the same time. Researchers carry their own portable digital cameras so that the pictures taken on location can be discussed in the production office. It depends on the type of production and the nature of the programme as to how much time and budget is spent on the recce. Filming a re-enactment of a battle in the middle ages for a historical programme at a castle clearly needs a precise and accurate recce. An interview in London may be able to be set up with just a phone call. Experienced producers never underestimate the value of a well planned recce.

Shooting

The structure of the programme is in place. The interviews and other activities to be filmed have been recced and set up for filming. The schedule is in place, and the film crew and artists booked. All you have to do is make sure you shoot enough exciting material to cover all elements of the story and make the editor happy.

Factual programmes are not known for large resources. As a researcher you are likely to have to go and interview a contributor. You may have a cameraman with you, or you may have to use a DV camera on your own.

You are likely to set up the interview on the telephone, so make sure you have done some research first. Make sure you know what you want to get out of the interview. If the interviewee is an expert in medieval sword fighting, and you know nothing about it, then explain to your interviewee that you would like to have some background knowledge before you film the interview.

Ask on the phone about possible suitable locations. You will sort out the exact location where your interview will take place when you have had a look round. Do

this before hand if you can. Choose a relaxing, quiet place. If it is interior then avoid busy wallpaper backgrounds, or pure white walls. Bookshelves are good, or an armchair with the background in subdued light. Do not film against a bright window unless you can light your subject –(see lighting).

Prepare what you are going to say, and do, on the day to relax and reassure your interviewee. People like to know what is going to happen, and what they should do. They want to know how long it will take, and sometimes even what they sort of clothes they should wear. They want to know about the programme the interview will be part of, when it is scheduled for transmission, and on what channel.

The sort of person you want for your programme is very likely to be busy. Make sure you do not waste their time. Be organised and efficient. Do not be vague, and unsure of how the equipment works. As soon as you have finished pack up and leave quickly. It is most important to ask the interviewee to sign a release form –without this you cannot broadcast the interview.

Ask open questions. Ask one question at a time. You will usually want to cut out your questions, and just use the answers. Those answers need to be as comprehensive as possible. Open questions begin with who, what, when , where, why and how.

Location Filming

The research has been comprehensive, and the selected interviewees are ready to appear in your production. You have chosen contributors to offer balanced views. You have in mind some interesting and possibly quite dramatic locations. Above all you know how you are going to tell this story so that it will appeal to an audience. The exact details will be finalised in editing, but you have a very good idea of the linear narrative of your programme before you shoot your first interview.

The production team need to organise a Schedule for each day of location filming.

- 1 Schedule for each day. What is going to happen, when and where. If you are employing a film crew or just a colleague then you must include a map of each location, and written directions of how to get there. Some smart production offices give grid references that can be input into a car satellite navigation system. Your presenter, maybe the contributor and your crew must know how to get to the location by the best possible route. Travelling takes time and time is money – your production money. You may have to stay overnight at the location. Put on the schedule the address, phone number and details of where the hotel/guest house is in relation to the filming location. Remember to put all your contact details on the schedule too, especially your mobile phone number and email.
- 2 Contact list of contributors, crew and production. This is an A4 sheet with the contact details of everyone involved in this shoot. This can be handed out to all personnel – remember to keep secure as personal details should not fall into the wrong hands.
- 3 Release Forms.
- 4 Clothing suitable for the occasion. There is a lot of standing around when you are filming, and it is important to keep warm. Old hands say keep your head warm at all times, and not too hot in the sun by wearing a hat, so that you can think clearly. Hence the ubiquitous use of US style caps. A cricket hat or cap works just as well and is cheaper. In the depths of winter wear heavy water proof clothing that would be suitable for skiing. Filming in England and you probably need a pair of wellies in the boot of the car.

- 5 Mini office. Most productions take a laptop to check emails and produce paperwork if necessary. I recommend for a longer shoot to take a portable printer to print updates to schedules, and scripts for the presenter.
- 6 For a fully digital set up you may be able to download your rushes straight into your laptop so that you can see your rushes in the evening and do a rough edit.
- 7 Have a very clear idea of what you are filming and how you are going to film it. Do discuss this with other members of the team. You are all working toward the same end – an exciting production.
- 8 Do make notes of things to do at the editing stage. Do take still pictures if you think it will be useful for publicity or other reasons.
- 9 Do not overspend your budget. Television producers and directors are required to deliver within budget at all times, unlike film directors.

Contributor's Release Form

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All contributors who appear in any production that is going to be broadcast must sign a release form. It is always better to get the form signed by all contributors, even if you are not sure if everyone you film will appear in the final edited sequence. The Contributor's Release Form covers all known rights in the universe. It is vital that you make sure you have all rights covered. Otherwise, when the broadcaster says that the interview is going on its web site, you could find that the copyright for this interview to be exploited in this way, is not covered. The form also covers any subsequent uses of your programme for video/DVD or internet distribution, or any other exploitation as yet to be discovered.

CONTRIBUTOR'S RELEASE FORM

Programme Title.....
Television Company
Address.....
Description of contribution (e.g interview).....
.....
Date of contribution.....
Name of Contributor.....
Address.....
Tel Nos (include mobile).....

In consideration of the above television company agreeing that I contribute to and participate in the above television programme, the nature of which has been fully explained to me, I hereby consent to the use of my contribution in the above programme. I agree that the copyright of this contribution shall be wholly vested in the television company
I agree to any future exploitation of this contribution by the company in all media and formats through out the universe.

Signed by Contributor.....
Date.....
Signed for the Company
Copy given to contributor.

Filming in public places

The only time when you do not require people to sign a release form is when filming in public places. This applies only to non-speaking members of the public who are filmed in public places going about their rightful business. Public places mean streets and roads and shopping areas, and other areas owned by the community.

In private locations that admit members of the public such as swimming pools it is not necessary to ask everyone in the pool to sign a release form. You will need the permission of the owner of the pool or manager to be filming and may have one area put aside for your use.

The rule is that people should be aware that you are filming. They have a right to know what you are filming, and what it is to be used for – news, documentary, entertainment programme or corporate video. They have a right to not take part if they

so wish. Sometimes a judiciously placed notice giving this information can avoid any difficulties. If any people do not want to be seen in the film you are making, then they should be able to keep away from the area where filming is taking place.

In no circumstances should you tell anyone you can cut them out of the film in postproduction. You will forget who that person is and what he or she looked like. In the context of getting your programme made this will not seem important, but it could land you with a nasty letter, or even worse a law suit.

If you are filming with a celebrity, or any well known personality, then you have the opposite problem of excluding the public from the filming area. This usually means employing security personnel, or cordoning off an area that you can use undisturbed.

Making a factual programme with children up to the age of sixteen is more difficult than it used to be. You must ask parents for permission to film their children, and make sure the parents sign a release form. Identifiable children cannot be filmed in public places without parental consent. If the children have to miss any schooling to take part in the filming then a Local Authority consent form is required.

This excerpt is from The Television Handbook, Third Edition, by Jonathan Bignell and Jeremy Orlebar (Routledge, 2005)