

BY TIFFANY DAVIS

# my day to day tv 101

Knowing *how to get your company or idea on the small screen* can catapult your career.

## HUMORIST AND JOURNALIST

Erma Bombeck once said that, “In general, my children refuse to eat anything that hasn’t danced on television.”

Funny quote. Still, it makes sense when it comes to the way our culture takes in new information about products and businesses. Think about it: Aside from us dutiful journalists, who would rather slog through written copy than experience a story live on TV?

When it comes to pitching your company or product for valuable on-air exposure, producers and bookers want a good story. So what makes a story look good?

## Show and Tell

“Know what they’re looking for and just give it to them,” says Rebecca Kent, a former video editor and writer for ABC News on Demand and current producer for NBC Mobile. Sounds straightforward enough. “Most producers and senior VPs of production are very busy,” Kent continues. “So anticipating their needs – which shows they work on, what types of angles they usually take for stories – really helps.”

Meg Reggie, an Atlanta-based publicist, says flatly, “If you can fit a producer’s needs, you’re in,” and she’s built her

business by doing just that. Before founding Meg Reggie Public Relations, she worked as a television news anchor and show host, and she did corporate publicity for America’s top 500 companies. Today she consistently places chefs, stationery designers and NFL clients on networks like DIY, CNN, ESPN and BET.

Reggie doesn’t say that hiring a publicist is the only way to get there, but she does know that industry insight can be invaluable. One of her tips? Try to get in during ratings seasons (traditionally February, May, July and November). During this time, local and national news channels are hungry for colorful stories and more open to less traditional pitches.

## The A.V. Department

After 13 years in news broadcasting and producing at different stations across the country, and a stint with a traditional PR firm, Katie Steines decided to focus on what she did best: placing clients on television by pitching them the way she’d always liked being pitched. According to Steines, now president and founder of Results on TV, the old cliché about knowing your audience rings doubly true in this arena.

In one recent example, Hurricane Katrina had a secondary effect on the news by triggering a flood of home insurance and financial tip segments on TV. Steines was able to place such expert clients on local and national networks at a time when producers and the public were hungry for their know-how.

After Steines determines the client information that needs to get out, she does what she calls “tweaking it away from



# covering the bases

## THE DO'S:

### GET MEDIA TRAINING.

### BE POLISHED.

### REMEMBER THE "B" ROLL.

### KNOW YOU'VE GOT A GOOD THING? BE DETERMINED.

## KEEP IN MIND:

You don't need formal media training to look good on camera, but informal Q & A practice sessions can help.

The time for prototypes is over.

According to TV planning editor Denise Petty, footage extras like still images, photos, backup experts and on-camera personalities are invaluable.

Publicist Meg Reggie once got turned down by an overbooked *Today* show. Instead she and her client set up an easel at Rockefeller Center during taping.

## SPECIFICS:

Books like *Media Training 101: A Guide to Meeting the Press* (John Wiley & Sons, 2003) cover the basics.

"Producers are looking for visually compelling packages," stresses NBC Mobile's Rebecca Kent.

Sound bites, cutaway footage and alternate shots come in handy for news formats, especially during lifestyle segments.

The result? A public crowd and live interview right on the spot.

## THE DON'TS:

### DON'T RELY ON PRESS KITS.

### DON'T BE OVERLY PERSISTENT.

### DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS.

### DON'T TELL PRODUCERS HOW TO DO THEIR JOBS.

## KEEP IN MIND:

Elaborate bios and video news releases may be fun to bill, but former producer Katie Steines says she never liked them.

Tricky, but important.

Find out how individual producers like to work and respect that.

According to Steines, entourages and last-minute "suggestions" won't be welcome on set.

## SPECIFICS:

"Keep it simple," Steines says. "Print may be all about the details, but TV is about getting to the point."

According to Petty, "If you don't hook me with a three sentence e-mail, a million follow-up calls probably won't change my mind."

Calling on deadline, being unprepared and trying to convince producers of stories they'd never cover are big no-nos.

Know what production need you or your client is fulfilling, and stick to it.

commercial." "While a commercial says, 'This is my project, look how great it is,'" Steines explains, "a story shows how a product or service might change an everyday person's life. I pitch stories."

Next, Steines sends a brief e-mailed paragraph, makes a quick follow-up phone call and then, if the producers show interest, provides more details depending on what angle has caught their attention. In a world of video packages and elaborate press kits, this might sound like understatement, but Steines regularly places clients on the CBS *Early Show*, *Dr. Phil* and *Today*, to name a few. Her motto: Clients only pay if they make it on air.

Heidi Jacquin, president of toy company tWibbles LLC, is one such happy client after repeated appearances on local news and a feature segment on the

CBS *Early Show*. She agrees that while there's almost nothing better for business than being featured on TV, there is also nothing more important than approaching it the right way. "You have to be prepared for anything," Jacquin says. In her case, that meant being ready on short notice for an on-air donation to Toys for Tots valued at \$100,000.

### Current Events

Thinking like a producer can be as simple as connecting your pitch to events that fall within a given time – for example, April and tax savings awareness – and being on top of angles that would add depth to the story.

"Sometimes, it's taking a hard news story and adding a lifestyle element," says Denise Petty, a planning editor and assignment coordinator who assists with

daily newscasts for a Dallas-Fort Worth NBC affiliate. "Or it's doing just the opposite by making news out of the everyday." Petty's programs have covered everything from the science behind ionic hair straighteners to Wal-Mart's fashion-forward corporate strategies.

In addition to being timely, Petty encourages pitchers to see the big picture. For example, she often works on beauty and fashion segments, so she gets approached all the time by potential style "experts." "A great makeup artist is fine," Petty says, "but can you demonstrate what works on someone who's not just in their 20s, but also in their 50s or their 70s? And putting together a segment on how to look slimmer is nice, but can you find someone willing to admit they need to lose a few pounds? Then you're thinking like a producer." ❧