
Pitching Secrets

(COMPLETELY NEW AND REVISED EDITION)

By

Howard Thomas

**How to present your concept or project to a
broadcaster.**

Guarantee

Study this book, follow the steps, enhance them creatively with your personal style and I guarantee you that your project will be presented to its best advantage.

I have spent 35 productive and happy years in show business and I am committed to help you do the same.

Introduction

Do you know that nearly every week, somewhere in the world, another television channel is coming on stream? I don't know how many 24-hour channels there are in the world. If there are 2000, and there are many more than that, then there are 48 000 hours of television a day. That's 17.5-million hours a year. If 95% of those hours are re-runs and repeats, then that leaves 876 000 hours of NEW television a year. If we apply the 80/20 rule, and we accept that South Africa is in the top 20 countries, then South Africa should be producing, for the world markets, 35 000 hours of NEW television material every year.

South Africa currently produces about 12 000 hours, and of that, only a small amount for the international markets.

Just look at our potential capacity! Three and a half times what we are doing already - that's a lot of money in the bank.

But we're not doing that. And why? Because we still suffer from the leftovers of an unfortunate legacy of a monopolistic television system that discouraged creativity and insisted on material that suited the broadcaster and what it wanted the public to see.

That system is all over. We now have an independent commercial broadcaster and we can expect another commercial station within the next two years. We can also look forward to regional commercial television and community television stations.

The face of television production is changing in South Africa. We have the capacity to realise our potential, and if you get in NOW, you can look forward to a prosperous and fulfilling career for the rest of your life.

You too, can be an international name.

About this book

This book is for the aspirant television producer who wants to make a mark on the international television scene. You need no background to come up with a stunning idea. All you need is a love for the medium of television, an understanding that television is all about satisfying audiences, and a ruthless ambition to get places.

To get your stunning idea accepted for development, you have to present it in a way that sells you, your capabilities, your creativity, and your understanding of the business of television.

Study this book carefully. Go through it a couple of times. Then approach this book again with your concept, and work through the step-by-step process. You will find yourself adapting your concept in order to make it useable as a business proposition. After all, television is a business, first and foremost. It is also part of show business, and the rules of show business apply.

"Show Business" is two words: a four-letter word and an eight-letter word. Notice that the "Business" word is twice as long as the "Show" word. That's because there is twice as much "Business" as "Show" in show business.

Understanding the business of television.

(Please note: all expressions of gender in terms of "he" and "she" should be taken as referring to both genders.)

The Business of the Broadcaster

A broadcaster is a person who makes his money by using the distribution of television to deliver audiences to advertisers.

The broadcaster is not a promoter of culture, a protector of morals, a propagandist, and educator, or an informer. He is simply a person who uses electronic distribution to attract audiences to his programming. The programming and the distribution costs him money. He makes his money by selling 8 minutes out of every hour to advertisers who want to reach the people who are watching at any one moment in time.

For that reason he also spends a large amount of money on audience research, so that he can accurately tell the advertisers how many and what sorts of people are watching the programmes he buys from producers.

In addition, he buys his programming very carefully to make sure that it appeals to the broadest range of people that advertisers want to reach. Advertisers do not want to spend money advertising to audiences that have no buying power. So it stands to reason, that the broadcaster will attract the largest amount of people who have the buying power to purchase the goods that advertisers have for sale.

In South Africa, the audience researchers use People Meters, telephone canvassing and interview techniques in order to determine how many, and what sort of people, are watching each and every channel, minute by minute.

Audiences are usually classified by age, gender, race, and Living Standards Measurement (LSM).

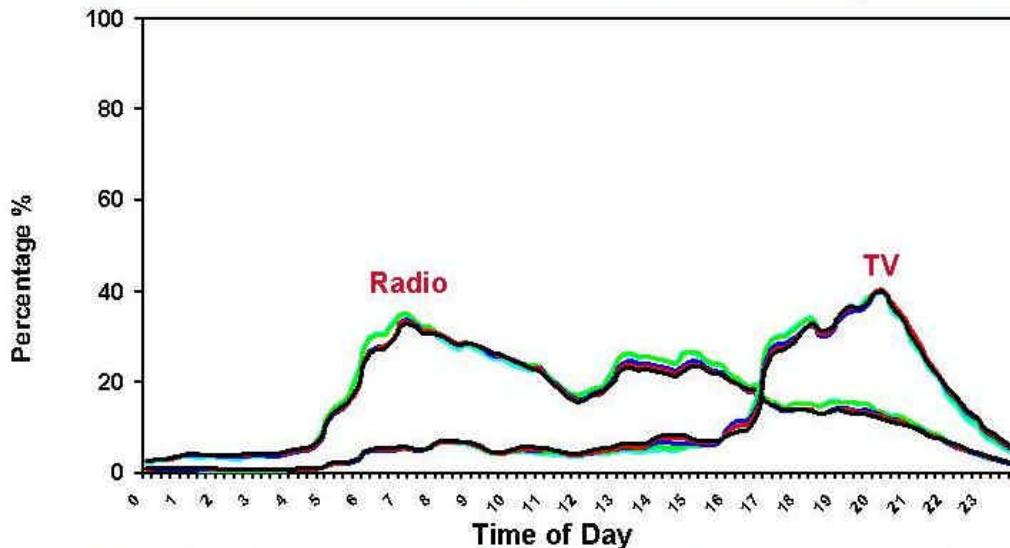
There are ten LSM's. LSM1 is at the bottom of the scale and is very poor. The very rich are in LSM10. However, LSM's are not just a measure income, but also education, lifestyle, interests and principally the things that people spend their money on. Of course, LSM's do refer to income levels, but it is not their prior function. Producers who can use the information available in AMPS (All Media Product Survey published by the South African Advertising

Research Foundation) will find themselves streets ahead when it comes to pulling together deals.

South African broadcasters tend to target LSM's 6 to 10, favouring LSM's 8 to 10, as these are the people most desired by the advertisers. People in the lower groups are targeted through other media, such as print, billboards, community radio, and so on.

People watch television when it suits them. A day's viewing usually looks like this, the world over.

¼ Hour Radio vs TV - Ave Monday - Friday



From midnight to 5am, there are virtually no viewers. The breakfast session pulls in those who can watch, and then it settles down to the morning viewers. There is a slight peak at lunchtime, before it settles down again to the afternoon audiences. Peak time starts at early evening and starts tailing off as the kids go to bed.

Peak viewing, or prime time, is when the broadcaster makes most of his money. He will put on his best programming, and will be prepared to pay good money for it if it pulls in the viewers. This means that he is tempted always to pack up the rest of the viewing time with re-runs and cheap programming.

When he schedules programmes, he will also look at what the other competitive channels are showing. If he can, he will try to attract viewers from other channels. If another channel has a programme that he cannot possibly match, then he will schedule a special interest programme that will definitely take away viewers in that special interest group.

Programme scheduling and the interpretation of audience research are highly skilled jobs, and the Scheduler and the Audience Research executives are amongst the highest paid on the channel. The Programme Buyer keeps in close consultation with the Audience Research and Scheduling people to make sure that he is buying the programming that is going to draw in the most audiences. Fashions and tastes change, so all of them have to be on their toes all the time.

Audiences are measured in terms of Audience Ratings (AR's). Briefly, an AR is the percentage of the available audience that is watching. Even at peak viewing time, only about 40% of the total available audience are watching. (This is clearly visible in the graph above). If there is only one channel, then the channel can expect to get an AR of 40. If there are four channels, and all have programmes of equal appeal, no channel can expect to get an AR of more than 10. If one channel gets an AR of 20, then the other three are sharing an AR of 20 between them.

Audiences are a fixed resource. You can't normally increase your available audience, so if you want to grow YOUR audience, you must put on programmes that will draw audiences from the other channels.

Television programming is very expensive. Only in very large populations, like the USA, can you afford top class programming and make a profit on it just with local broadcasts. If you want to compete with the world class standards set by Europe and the United States, then you must invest money in your programming to make it world class standards, and then get your money back (and your profit) by selling to the foreign stations.

If you are going to buy programming only for local consumption, and made locally, then you have to restrict your budgets to what is profitable.

So what is profitable?

Let's take an example, a very hypothetical one.

Suppose the overhead of the station is R50-million a year. This pays the rent, salaries and transmission costs 24 hours a day.

The station charges for advertising according to the number of viewers it has at any one time of the day. Peak time is from about 6pm to 9pm. Suppose it gets R200 000 an hour for that time, R100 000 an hour for another 4 hours a day, and about R50 000 an hour for the rest of the 11 hours. For 6 hours, it attracts no advertising. This gives the station R1.55-million a day. This is R566-million a year.

Taking off the overhead of R50-million, the gross before buying programmes is R516-million. If it wants to make 25% profit on that, it has R387-million for programme buying and marketing. If it knows it will have to spend R100-million a year marketing the programmes, then it can spend R287-million a year, which is an average of R786 000 a day. If it spends a nominal amount of R50 a minute during the night, and R300 a minute during off-peak times, (R203 000) then it has (R583 000) - an average of R2 800 a minute to spend on peak hour entertainment.

Since it can buy American blockbusters for as little as R600 a minute, and if it had 50% local content during peak viewing, it would be able to spend R5 000 a minute on local programming.

Since we know that magazine programmes can be made (at a pinch) for R2000 a minute, documentaries about R4 000 a minute, then it has to be pretty smart to be able to afford a local drama at R15 000 a minute.

Bear in mind that this is only an hypothetical example, and actual cases can vary. But it does give you an idea of how the broadcaster arrives at ballpark figures for programming costs. It also shows why he has to do some nifty footwork to be able to afford local programming without making extra money on the programming by selling it on the international markets.

Say a drama costs R15 000 a minute, or R780 000 an hour (an hour is 52 minutes). Say it can sell abroad for \$2 000 an hour. If it sells to 50 stations, it will make \$100 000 in overseas sales. Now we're talking money.

In practice, you are lucky if you sell mediocre programming to 10 stations at \$100 an hour. (Do you see how confusing the South African practice of measuring costs in "per finished running minute", when the rest of the world works on US\$ per hour.)

However, there are 1700 stations in the USA alone, so if you make good programming, you can sell it widely, and for many years to come. "I love Lucy" is still selling to major networks after 40 years.

However, don't think that the broadcaster restricts himself to buying programming for a particular hour, that he can only afford according to the income in the same hour.

In any one prime time period, he could make an absolute fortune out of a popular foreign programme that he bought really cheap, and use the profits to subsidise an expensive locally produced programme where the costs are such that that particular hour runs at a loss. The broadcaster cross-subsidises, and aims to make an overall profit. So it's really quite flexible.

The Business of Manufacturing Programmes

Get it straight right from the beginning. There is no mystery or magic about show business. It is just another manufacturing business.

Take tinned peas, for example. You like tinned peas, but the range available on the supermarket shelf doesn't appeal to you at all. You think your grandmother's recipe would sell much better. So you make up a small sample, and try it out on your friends.

What have you done? You've simply followed the first two cardinal rules of manufacturing.

1. ***Look for a gap in the market.***
2. ***Check that there is a market in the gap.***

Next, you take your recipe to the Patents Office, and you take out a patent. That's rule three.

3. ***Protect your intellectual property.***

Now you take your idea (in a neatly presented form, probably with a sample) and you go to the supermarkets and get a commitment that they will give you shelf space. That's rule four.

4. ***Tie up your distribution.***

Now you design your budgets and your marketing plan, working out how much it will cost to make and sell the peas, how many you can sell, how much money you need to get it going, and how much money you will make. That's rule five.

5. ***Work out your marketing and costs.***

Now you go to the bank and raise the money. Rule six.

6. ***Get the finance.***

Now, and only now, do you start manufacturing. Manufacturing is always the last step in the process. Distribution is always the first.

Television is exactly the same.

You get an idea; you test it out on a sample of people. You look at what is being shown on TV (look for a gap in the market), and then you do some serious checking through the audience research (check if there's a market in the gap.)

Then you copyright your concept. It's quite easy. Just putting your name to it adequately protects you, but there are numerous other ways of registering copyright and buying protection.

Now you tie up your distribution. In show business, it's called "making a pitch to the broadcaster". This pitch is the subject of the bulk of this book.

If he buys it, or is interested, or wants to negotiate co-production, or even just development finance, you're on your way. If you pitch it to every broadcaster, and they all give you the thumbs down, put it in the bottom of your filing cabinet drawer, and leave it to rest indefinitely while you ply your skills to coming up with other concepts.

Once you have tied up the distribution, the rest of the steps will happen. Not smoothly, but given time, sweat, tears and possibly a lot of heartbreak, it will all come together. The process of doing deals, tying up the finance and designing the marketing are the hard part. The actual manufacturing is always the easiest part.

Because it's the easiest part, producers tend to focus on it, as it gives them a sense of achievement in just making plans that seem to go well.

That's where most producers go wrong. Before they've even pitched the concept, they've designed every aspect of the shoot. If the concept doesn't fly, look at the time and energy you've wasted.

At this stage, put every thing you have into the concept, and your pitching of it. Forget about the manufacturing. By the time you get down to it, technology may have changed, your planned leading lady may be dead, and thousands of others may have pioneered a better way to make it.

Focus on what's at hand.

The Business of Buying Programmes.

Make no mistake; you and your project are important to the broadcaster. You could have a bum idea, but you could have a second Star Wars. You don't know, and the broadcaster doesn't know until he sees you.

Once she's seen you, she will know within just a few minutes whether SHE thinks it has potential. I say SHE, because everyone is tainted with personal tastes and personal perceptions of what the audiences want. For that reason, she may either refer it to other readers for their comments, or if she rejects it outright, you must pitch it to her competition.

When you've been rejected by all of them, you can be pretty sure your idea is a no-no.

At the end of the pitching session, even if it is as short as five minutes, the broadcaster will mentally categorise your pitch, in one of these:

1. He must be mad if he thinks audiences will go for that!! (He smiles, shows you the door, and forgets you fast.)
2. Great idea, the producer has a good track record, a sound infrastructure and really knows the business. (He makes an appointment for you to meet the Programme Buying Team.)
3. Great idea, but there are a number of aspects that need working on. (He makes an appointment to see you some time in the future so that he can discuss development.)
4. Fantastic idea, but the guy has never produced before and he'll never get off the ground in a month of Sundays. (He makes a plan to introduce you to a top rate production house to discuss a possible deal that will respect your ownership of the concept, and at the same time give you access to the expertise to get it made.)

How the programme is bought, commissioned, or produced is as flexible and varied as grains of sand on the seashore. There are a hundred thousand ways of pulling a deal together, ranging from outright purchase to a co-production syndicate spanning entire continents.

This book deals with the pitch. The pitch ends when the broadcaster says "Yes" or "No". This book is thin. The book on deal making is thicker than the Encyclopaedia Britannica.

What concepts sell?

There is a constant wail by the critics in the world of television: "Why do producers keep doing what everyone else does differently? When is someone going to come up with something DIFFERENT?"

This is so valid, but it's a phenomenon of business.

When a businessperson (and a broadcaster is first and foremost a businessperson) makes a decision, she tries to be safe. "Safe" means basing it on what has happened in the past. If she wants to do something new, she takes a risk.

The broadcaster is owned by shareholders, and they want to make a profit. They want him to play it safe AND to make buckets of money for them. He is only going to make buckets of money if he takes risks. So the broadcaster treads a careful tightrope between taking risks, and playing it safe. The broadcaster who takes lots of risks that don't pay off, gets fired by the shareholders, and probably never works in broadcasting again.

The audiences on the other hand want choices, adventure and innovation. After all, this is entertainment, and they don't get entertained by the same old thing for very long.

So the broadcaster wants, from you, the independent producer, something different, that is safe. Since that is in itself a contradiction in terms, you can see that it is almost impossible to answer the question, "What sort of concepts sell?"

The easiest thing to say is that the broadcaster wants something fresh, where she can minimise the risk by researching and developing it well, so that by the time it gets to the audiences, everyone is fairly certain that it is a winner.

Remember, in broadcasting, you only have one shot. In one broadcast, the programme has been shown to everyone. If it bombs, no one is going to watch the next in the series, and the advertisers will withdraw their support.

Broadcasters like series. They don't really like one-off programmes. Just picture her. She is facing his projected schedule for the next year. It consists of 365 vertical blocks, each divided into 24 horizontal chunks. If you come along with a 26 minute documentary, she has to go through the whole process of negotiating, deal making, developing and producing, and all she gets from it is a tiny little back mark that fills in one forty-eighth of just one of 365 days.

If you come along with a series of 52 one-hour programmes, she does one deal, goes through one process of negotiation and production, and she fills in a broad stripe across the entire year.

Furthermore, he wants to give the audiences continuity. He wants to grab them one night at the beginning of the run, and see them loyally tune in every night for the rest of the run. The advertisers like it too. Of course, the audience wants variety and innovation, so the series has to contain constant entertainment and surprises.

So, in general, broadcasters like concepts that are in a series (or a parcel of programmes), that appeal to a broad base of the audience, that attracts the right audiences for the right advertisers, and that holds the audiences for the entire run.

That's a pretty tall order, but take it as a challenge.

What do audiences want?

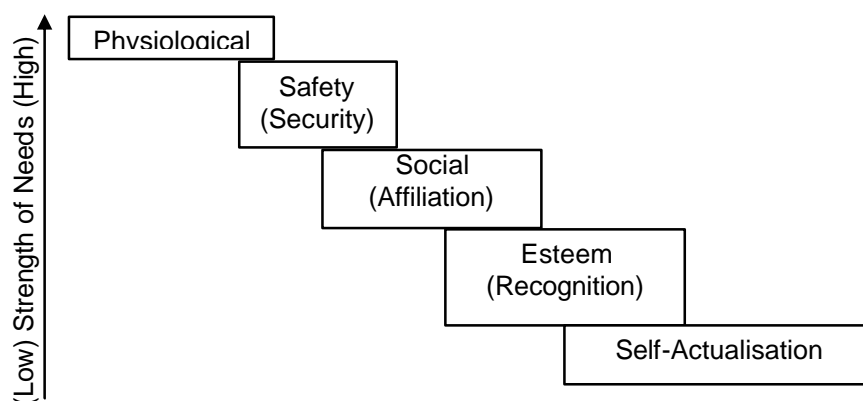
That's the easy one. They want programmes that satisfy their needs.

So, what are their needs?

The behaviour of people at a particular moment in time is usually determined by their strongest need.

A framework that helps explain the strength of needs was developed by Abraham Maslow. He found a hierarchy into which human needs arrange themselves. This is illustrated in

Figure 1



The Physiological needs are shown at the top of the hierarchy because they tend to be the strongest until they are satisfied. These are the basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. Until these are satisfied, other needs will provide little motivation.

Before seeing how needs change in their strength and order, let us first see what needs fall into these five categories.

Physiological Needs

The satisfaction of physiological needs (shelter, food and clothing) is usually associated with money. Obviously people are not motivated for money itself, but for the needs that money can satisfy. This does not mean that money only satisfied physiological needs. When we discuss the other needs in the hierarchy, we will see that money plays a part in satisfying these needs as well, but is a less appropriate tool, and therefore does not play as large a part. Esteem and self-actualisation are largely fulfilled by internal qualities of the person concerned. People cannot create food and shelter out of their mental abilities.

Safety (Security) Needs

These needs can be conscious or subconscious. Conscious needs are evident and common. We all desire to free of the hazards of life – accidents, war, disease, and economic instability. In this way organisations offer job security and employment benefits. Products offer safety, long life, maintenance contracts, and trouble-free operation. Much of the security people seek is coloured by their own personalities – thus a free-lance artist sees security in freedom of creativity, rather than an oppressive corporate structure in which he has financial security but no artistic freedom.

Security needs can also be subconscious. For instance in depressed economic areas where prospects for improvement are poor, parents will often engender in children to accept whatever fate offers them, just for the sake of security. People raised in a security-minded home may not feel they are competent enough to influence their environment.

To many people, security carries with it a negative connotation. It goes against the risk needed for ambition and adventure.

Social (Affiliation) Needs

After physiological and security needs are satisfied, then social needs may become predominant. People are social animals, but the need is stronger in some people than in others. The social need of belongingness is quite complex.

People seek company because they are looking for fellowship and companionship. They also tend to want their beliefs confirmed so they mix with people who share their social, religious and political beliefs. They also tend to seek out those who are in "the same boat". Misery does not just love company, it loves other miserable company. Group behaviour is complicated giving rise to comments like "when people have the freedom to do what they like, they generally imitate each other".

Esteem Needs

The need for esteem or recognition appears in a number of forms.

Prestige. This is summarised as "keeping up with the Jones's". Prestige covers the conduct others are expected to follow in your presence. It determines how comfortably or conveniently you can expect to get along in life.

Some people strive for the material symbols of status, others for personal achievement to command prestige. Regardless of the way it is expressed, there is a widespread need for people to have their importance clarified, and set at a level each one feels is deserved. When people have achieved the level they feel is warranted, the need declines.

Power. This is the resource that enables people to induce compliance from others. There are two types of power, position and personal. Position is bestowed due to rank in the organisation or society, while personal power comes from your own personality and behaviour.

This starts at an early age when babies realise that when they cry they influence their parents' behaviour. People with feelings of inferiority will resort to extreme effort to achieve what they feel would otherwise be denied. Others desire power because it is very pleasurable. Still others seek power without the task aspect, and want to structure and manipulate their environment through harmonious human relationships.

Self-actualisation Needs

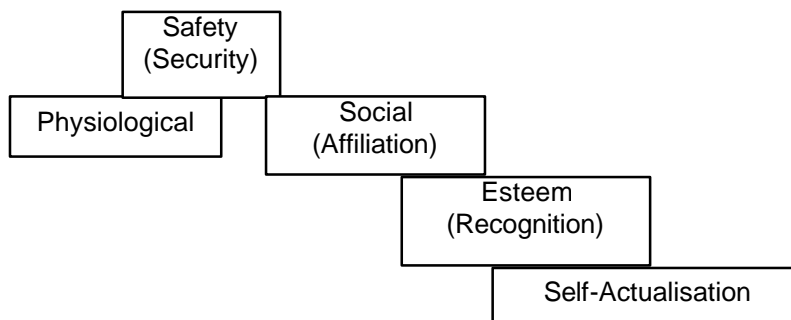
People satisfy this in various ways, and it is the need least understood.

Competence. Competence implies control over environmental factors, both physical and social. Again, it starts off at an early age with children wanting to handle everything in sight. Feelings of competence are erratic; they can change as circumstances induce attitudes of success or failure. Put simply, people want to be good at what they do. It gives them a feeling of fulfilment, and this in turn fulfils their need for esteem.

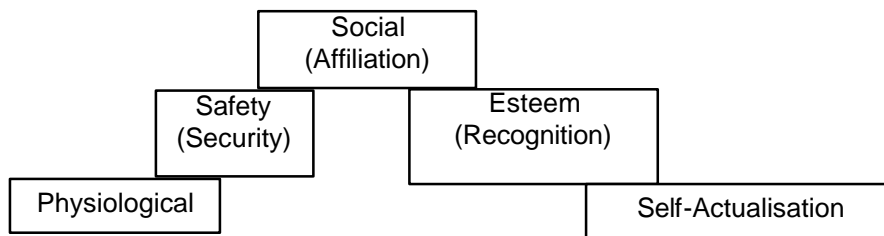
Achievement. Achievement motivated people are not gamblers. The need to achieve is in some people and not in others. Achievers want to achieve – the rewards that come with it are not as pleasurable as the feeling of achievement. However, achievement-oriented people simply want to do things better, and this can apply to the housewife as much as the ambitious executive.

Money plays a part in fulfilling all needs, some to a greater degree than others. Needs and motives are coloured by individual personality, but when it comes to assessing people in groups, the Hierarchy of Needs is the best we have with which to make valid generalisations.

The following diagrams show the changing hierarchy, when a need other than physiological becomes predominant.



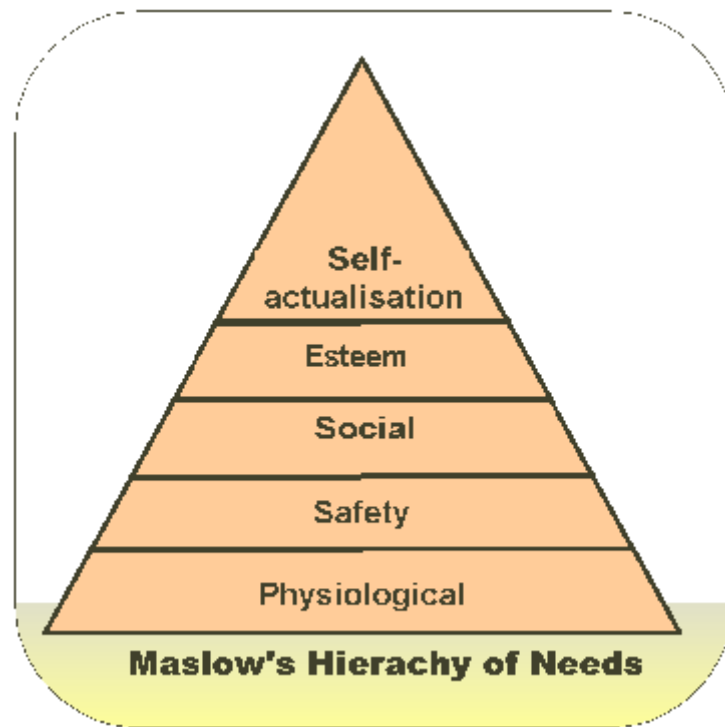
In this case, the physiological needs are satisfied, and the main concern is for safety of the person and property.



Here the social needs are foremost, with safety and esteem following. If self-actualisation needs are strongest, then all other needs follow – physiological being the lowest.

Let's summarise Maslow's theories, which by the way are generally accepted as being the ideal model by which to understand people.

Here is Maslow's Needs Hierarchy set into a triangle:



Talking generally, people's physiological and safety needs are satisfied by the time they seek out entertainment. They have eaten, they are at home, comfortably and safely, so they expect enteratinment to satisfy their **Social**, **Esteem** and **Self-actualisation** needs. After all that, we are close to getting to understand what entertainment is all about.

What is entertainment?

Entertainment is one of the most under-rated industries in the world. The audiences, who are largely unaware of the extent to which it enriches their lives and their societies, appreciate it. It is sought after by investors who see it as a high return, if risky, investment.

Governments and social opinion-makers tend to regard it as frivolous and having little or no contribution to social values. Instead, they value the arts and culture. They are totally unaware that the arts and culture are just a branch of entertainment.

There is also a big grey area known as "media entertainment". This is supposed to refer to any communication financed by advertising. However, how often do you now go to museums and find that they carry advertising? Almost all media and entertainment are nowadays financed in one way or another by advertising and sponsorship.

Look what happens when a society bans entertainment? Just look at the stagnant, barren and empty societies created in the old communist Russia and China, where entertainment was driven underground because it is a commodity people don't just want - they need it.

Why?

Entertainment is common to every society and civilisation in the world. It has its roots in religion, mysticism and the seeking for communion with the spirits and gods.

Every man knows that there is more to him, and to life, than just existing. Every man in every society knows that he has powerful potential within him, and that there are forces outside of him that are more powerful than he is. He has always believed that if he can either harness, or find favour with these forces, then he can achieve great things.

In all societies, it started off with religion. Religion creates ritual and magic (or the esoteric, or whatever you want to call it). In every society, at some stage or another, the same elements that belong to religion, broke away and became non-religious (no longer under the control of the priests). In some societies, it became openly commercial. That's what we call show business.

So what is the essence that is common to religion and to entertainment?

It's simply the creation of products that produce an emotional reaction in people, that they in turn USE for their own personal purposes.

A religious ceremony that purports to bring closer to their god or gods, gives them the belief that they are stronger and can face the difficulties of life much better. The ceremony produces emotions of pleasure, stimulation and self-assurance. As a result, they feel powerful. They use these emotions to fulfil their esteem and self-actualisation needs.

Do you see the process? The ceremony induces emotions of pleasure that are used by the audience to meet their esteem needs.

So we come all the way back to needs. They are met through the creation of emotional reactions. These emotional reactions are induced by the religious product (the ceremony).

Entertainment is exactly the same. The only difference is that the motive to making the product is a commercial one. You make a product people can use, and in return, you make money selling the product.

This you have to understand. Entertainment is a USEFUL product. People USE it to meet their basic needs, which are usually social, esteem and self-actualisation needs.

There's nothing mysterious about this. The ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle, wrote about it nearly 2 500 years ago in his book, "On the Art of Poetry". He explained why the Greeks went mad about Greek tragedy, those heavy plays with a sad ending that raked in the crowds in their thousands.

He found that all tragedies were about a tragic hero, who, under normal circumstances, was totally in control of his life and his environment. However, given a certain set of circumstances, a small flaw in his character, a minute weakness in his nature, would bring about his downfall. This inevitable downfall induced feelings in the audience of pity and fear (pity for the character, a fear that it could happen to you). These feelings, Aristotle called *catharsis*.

He was absolutely right, except, that today we find it hard to understand what he was getting at unless we look at it through our eyes. A tragic story is about downfall. The audience identifies with the flaws in the tragic hero's character, because he knows it can happen. He feels a mixture of fear and pity.

That is common in the whole audience. How individuals in the audience USE those feelings of pity and fear depends on the individual. People USE emotions for their own purposes and for their own reasons.

Remember, one of the cardinal rules of entertainment:

People in the audience USE emotions for their purposes NOT yours. Your job as an entertainer is to make the product that produces those emotions.

There is a very small range of emotions that entertainment produces. People use them for different purposes at different times of their lives. There is no end to audiences craving for those emotions. The only thing is that they want those emotions induced in new and different ways.

If you understand this, you probably understand more about entertainment than 99% of the people who work in it.

Let's summarise.

All people have basic needs, and they will do anything to get them satisfied. These needs are:

Physiological
Security
Social
Esteem
Self-actualisation

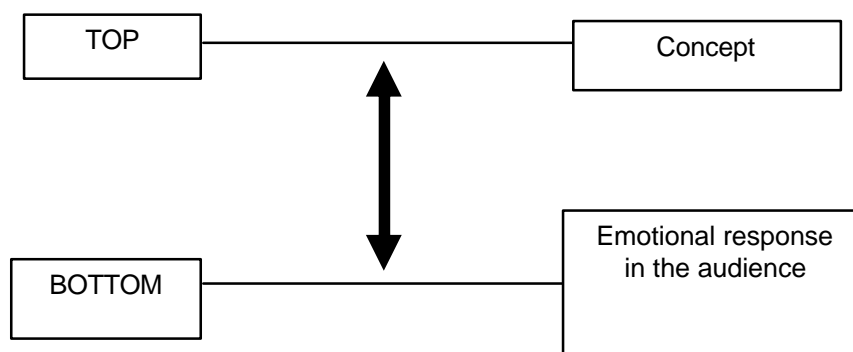
Physiological and security needs are met through jobs, money, food and shelter.

Entertainment is one of the most powerful ways of meeting the other three needs: social, esteem and self-actualisation

Entertainment is the commercial process of making products that produce emotions in audiences that they can use. The more useful these emotions, the more they will pay.

How does this apply to the business of creating products?

There are two ways of working. You can work top-down or bottom-up.



The top-down way of creating concepts, is the most common way. You come up with an idea. You analyse it to find what emotional responses it will elicit. Then you go back to the steps we went through earlier: find a gap in the market, look for a market in the gap, and so on.

The bottom-up way is less hit and miss. You look for an emotional response, and then build up a concept that meets that need. This process is common in the higher levels of show business, where executives are looking for something that's going to smash a hit a concept on a competitive channel.

The top-down way is probably the way you are working. You are reading this because you have a great idea, and you want to pitch it to a broadcaster. Now we can get onto the next step, which is finding out what emotional effects your concept will have on audiences.

Analysing the concept

What follows is based on the standard way of working developed by Hollywood over the last one hundred years. Even so, that was not new. Aristotle's Greeks were working this way 2000 years ago.

Presumably you have a clear idea of what your proposed programme will look like, how long it will run, and what it will say.

Step 1

Ask yourself:

How will the audience FEEL after they have seen my programme?

Make a list of the feelings that will be induced in the audience.

Don't just say, happy or sad. Go through all the things that happen and are said in the programme, list them, and next to each, write down the emotional reaction of the audience.

Next to that, write down the basic needs that the feelings fulfil. For instance:

What happens, or is said	What they will feel	Needs
John commits suicide because Jane doesn't love him	What a waste of a life because in fact she does love him, but they couldn't communicate properly. It is a feeling of fear that this could happen to me if I don't make a point of communicating.	Esteem and self-actualisation.
The ballet dancer explains that she always knew that she could use her body to say things that she couldn't express in words	Maybe there is some way in which I can communicate because I am also bad with words. It is a feeling of desire to learn more about myself.	Self-actualisation, power
The cook shows how simple it is to make a great dish out of leftovers	I can do the same. A feeling of triumph, and also power because I know something others don't.	Power
In the sitcom, there are lots of laughs from young people who are so uninhibited that they enjoy life to the full.	These people enjoy life to the full. There's so much more to life than my humdrum existence. I must find other outlets. A feeling of hope in my own potential.	Esteem, social, power, self-actualisation
Film stars at cocktail parties, in glamorous clothing, talking about how happy they are in their marriages	Look at all those beautiful happy people. Even if I can't be them, I can dream that I could be like them. Feelings that appeal to self-actualisation.	Social, self-actualisation

Step 2

Go through the entire programme that your concept will produce. List every element of the plot, the format, the style, and write down the feelings these elements induce, and the needs they satisfy. This table will help you:

Category	Element	Feelings	Needs
Plot			
Information			
Style			
Personalities			
Genre			

Step 3

Summarise

Go through your list and choose the five most important feelings that are induced, and the needs they satisfy.

Now you have the justification for your programme concept - the reason why the broadcaster should look at it closely, and why it will be successful and make him money.

Step 4

Go for the essence

Now look at your list of five, and choose one that is the most important. This gives you the leading appeal of the concept.

Getting to the branding

We are getting places. Now you need to do an exercise that will lead the way to you doing something very important - establishing an elementary branding.

You've seen the posters that are made for films, the ones that are put up on bus shelters, and used for newspaper and magazine advertisements. They always have a dramatic picture, the names of the lead stars, and a few words that make you want to go and see the film. These words are called the High Concept. They look like this:

Even on the highest mountain, you can find love.

They stole - money and hearts.

There was a war on, but they found the secret of life.

Write a High Concept for your programme. You can find one even if it's a drama, wildlife documentary, a cookery programme or a kiddie's literacy programme. The High Concept must be short, tantalising, sell the concept, and invite you to watch it.

Now write the entry that will appear in the TV Guide. You know what it looks like. They give the channel name, then the time, then the name of the programme. Below that, in two lines they describe the programme. Write out this entry, short but accurate. You must describe and sell the programme in the same sentence.

Now look at your High Concept, and the TV Guide entry. Write out a description of the programme in about ten lines that enlarges on the High Concept, and the TV Guide entry, but also gives more detailed information about the programme. At the end of it, write down a short extra paragraph that says how the audience will feel, and how they will benefit from the programme.

In this last paragraph, don't just list the emotional responses and the needs they fulfil. Write it out in an imaginative simple way that describes their feelings and why they will enjoy it (which is another way of saying how they USE the emotional responses). Just don't write it out as if you are a psychologist.

Now you are ready for the most important step you will take in getting your concept off the ground.

Have a look at successful magazines. Notice how on the front cover, they have the name of the magazine and a few words that describe what the magazine is all about. These words are in fact the "magazine" equivalent of the High Concept of a feature film.

Women's magazines do these things very well with:

Everything I can do, I can do better.

For women who want to know more

All the woman you want to be.

Fashionably first

In just a few words, you know exactly what they are all about, where they're at, and what sort of things they contain. It also tells you exactly who the readers are.

The High Concept on a film tells you what sort of emotions you will experience when you see the film. The branding statement on a woman's magazine tells you what it contains, and who reads it. It doesn't tell you what race or social class of woman reads it, but it accurately describes the mind-set of the type of person who will enjoy it.

This is where you want to get to when you come up with a branding statement for your programme. You want to describe what is in it, and what sort of people will watch it. This statement is not for marketing to the audiences but to market your concept to the broadcaster. Later on when the programme is being made, you will use it to help everyone who works on it, understand where the programme is at.

It should be between 5 and 15 words long. Just by reading it carefully, you should know exactly the content, style and what the audience will get out of it.

Here are some examples:

Drama series about war:	They were just kids, but they could fight like old soldiers.
Cookery programme:	Cooking is not just mixing things, it's about mixing people.
Arts magazine:	The mysteries of art are explained by looking within yourself.
Wildlife documentary:	Animals are just furry human beings.
Sitcom:	They were young, they were raw, but they could play grown-up's games.

We're nearly there!

Overseas sales

Earlier on, we saw that it is very important for there to be some potential for overseas sales, otherwise you have very severe budget constraints. However, you must understand something about versioning.

The broadcaster could look at your concept and see that in fact there is very good reason to make two versions. This could entail shooting some of the scenes twice, and only having to do two edits. He could then get out a programme suitable for the local market, and another version that will sell well abroad. It may be worth while doing, as it may be profitable to invest in two versions, and pull in a large local audience, whereas the international version alone may not have a great local appeal.

It's going to help you with your concept if you can spot this potential on your own. There may not be much work entailed in making an international version at all. For instance, a social documentary on South Africans may have great local appeal where there is quite a lot of indigenous language, slang or colourful language. This may not work abroad as the viewer won't have the slightest idea of what is going on. However, an international version, which could look very bland to local viewers, would handle the problems with re-shoots in English, or sub-titling, or even voice over's. You would also need totally different commentary. Everyone on South Africa knows where Durban is, but very few people abroad have ever heard of it.

So have a look at your programme, and see if:

1. The whole programme, as it is, could be sold abroad, even if it's only in Africa.
2. An international version is possible or feasible.
3. Segments of the programme could be versioned or repurposed for sale.

Personalities and stars

Television is a people business, and show business is the business of stars. You can't get away from it, and you must make the most of it. It isn't essential, but it's going to help if you have specific personalities in mind for acting the roles, or presenting the programme.

Some of the most successful television programmes ever were actually designed around the personalities and stars.

In ten minutes, you haven't a hope of going through all the material you have to offer. So make the best of the time. You are as important, if not more so, than the material you have on offer. If you are pitching one concept, divide the time between you and your concept. If you are pitching 10 of them, devote a third of the time to you, and two-thirds to the best three. However, all this is flexible, and you must do the best with the time that suits your personality and your products.

You don't need props, overhead projectors, or any particular dress form. The broadcaster wants to meet what's between your ears.

He wants to know:

1. What you know about entertainment in general and television in particular. If you know very little, it's not really a disadvantage. You may be a budding genius, and anyway those that know lots are often pretty useless at delivering programming.
2. What your ideas are and where you get them.
3. Why you are passionate about them.

The last item, your **PASSION** is what's going to sell your concept. The reason why there are so many bad films made, is that so many independent producers are so passionate about their lousy projects, that the studio executives believe that "this will be the one." Fortunately television is a slightly more precise and scientific form of entertainment.

Your leave-behind

You will leave behind your showreel and a document that explains each of your projects in detail.

1. Showreel

Keep it short. Who has the time to go through a 20-minute reel? Keep it to three or four minutes, cover the best of what you have done briefly. Everyone knows that in post production, when you compile the reel, you can "fix" the pictures and sound from here to kingdom come. So put it together with imagination, flair and try to give as accurate a picture of your work as possible.

2. Documents

These vary from genre to genre, and there is no fixed format. What you have to do is give a description of the project. Why follow what I am going to recommend? Hey! Invent a new way! Do something different! This is show business!

You need the following headings:

- i. Working Title
- ii. Branding Statement
- iii. Genre
- iv. Duration
- v. Overview
- vi. Target audience
- vii. Personalities/stars
- viii. Style
- ix. Content
- x. Foreign sales potential
- xi. Marketing and merchandising
- xii. My company's CV and values
- xiii. My CV
- xiv. Contact address and details.

Lay the document out in a readable and attractive way. Make it flashy with colour pictures, or plain and simple -that's your choice. Bind it or staple it, that's your choice.

In the Overview, rewrite the ten-liner in about half a page if you like.

In the Content section, if it is a series, give plot or content outlines for each episode (unless it is actuality, in which case you define the type of content you will and will not handle.) If it is drama, you may want to include pen-sketches of the main characters. If it is a game show, give an outline of the rules of the show. For a documentary series, give an outline of the story of each episode.

In the Marketing and Merchandising section, bear in mind that there are always other opportunities to make money. Do you know that just Coke and popcorn makes up a quarter to a half of cinema income? Do you know that a pop concert only takes in 20% of the total income in gate money? There could be all sorts of deals that can be done ranging from T-shirts to toys, product placement to trade exchanges. If you have any ideas, put them in. If you don't have any ideas, it doesn't matter - the broadcaster's marketing department will think of them.

Conclusion

Off you go. As you can see, all the so-called "magic" of show business is all just a lot of mystique that show business itself has created, in order to sell it.

Every aspect of entertainment can be rationally explained. If it is done properly, it's quite a scientific process, as scientific as psychology.

Just stick to the principles, don't get way-laid by the hooey, and look upon it as just another manufacturing and marketing process.

There's only one difference between show business and making tinned peas:

It's a hell of a lot more fun!