

Perfect pitches for podcasting

Connie St Louis | November 2017

A podcast pitch is a brief outline of a potential story you want to produce, targeted at an editor, communications manager or think tank director. It should answer the question: why does this story matter?

What makes a good pitch?

The podcast you suggest needs to be original and have enough going for it to make the editor commission it. If it is about a familiar subject, it needs a fresh angle. Do not recycle stuff from the internet. New ideas and new ways of doing old ideas are at a premium. In short, podcasts need to be topical and have a hook.

Pitches also need to convince an editor that you can deliver the podcast. This means you must give a comprehensive outline of the podcast, list the sources you will go after and the people you have already contacted.

Your podcast pitch should be no more than one side of A4 and be set out clearly, in whole sentences. No tatty notes please. After all, you are communicating an idea that you want taken seriously enough to allocate resources to, be it time or money. Great pitches usually have some initial work behind them (research, commitment from contributors, etc.)

Helen Oldfield, deputy editor of the Weekend Guardian magazine, who commissions stories regularly explains:

“What I look for in a pitch is firstly that is really well written. This is crucial because if it’s not, you immediately think; do I really want a whole feature written by this person? It needs to be no more than one side of A4 – more than that and nobody will read it all. It needs to lay out the podcast clearly and not be reams of endless stuff. If it sounds familiar or would have been good two years ago, then it won’t get commissioned. You also need to convince the editor that you are the best person to do the podcast.”

What to include

When writing a pitch, follow the format set out below. You can deviate from it a little, but be sure to be crystal clear about what you are saying.

1. Give your pitch/podcast a title. Make sure your title indicates immediately what your podcast is about.

Samples:

- Why has there been a rise in teenage pregnancies in the UK?
- What should be done about the proliferation of plastic bags, which never decompose?
- The UK has gone samba/tango/break dancing mad. Why?
- EU directives on vitamins and supplements will seriously affect our health
- The UK government should withdraw business interest in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where human rights abuses have reached an all-time low
- Ken and Barbie should not be allowed to divorce: Mattel should be taken to task

2. Provide brief outline of your podcast. Then include details about its format, length, the duration of each episode (if it is a series) and the name of the presenter (if using one).

Sample:

Plastic bags are a menace. Thousands of these harmless-looking, useful things are clogging up the environment, according to X, Y and/or Z. Landfill managers are in despair as the bags take hundreds of years to biodegrade. Why haven't major stores and supermarkets introduced measures to reduce this ecological threat? Are they going to? What are the global implications? Do we need plastic bags? What's wrong with the old-fashioned basket?

How I will deliver this podcast:

Friends of the Earth (FoE) has announced a campaign to hit supermarkets where it hurts. It will be launched in two weeks. FoE has lobbied MPs to introduce a motion outlawing the use of plastic bags. MPs X, Y and Z are sponsoring this motion. Supermarket chiefs have so far refused to comment.

I will be interviewing MP X, Y and Z. Y and Z have agreed to the interviews and X is abroad, but I hope to catch her by the end of the week. Clare Stroppyperson, a FoE member and campaigner has collected 1,000 plastic bags from streets, gutters, bins, fields and lay-bys all over the UK and plans to dump them in a supermarket next Wednesday. I have spoken to her and she is pre-

pared to give me an exclusive face-to-face interview. She has also informed me that John Tightlips, chief executive of Junkfoods Limited., which has stores all over the UK, has sent her two threatening emails. She will let me have this material. I have approached Mr. Tightlips for a comment and await a reply.

Note: If the podcast needs case histories as well as authoritative commentators, as many programmes do, indicate who you would interview and how you would get their stories.

3. Conclude with a brief run-down of who you have approached, who you intend to approach (apart from those already mentioned) and where your background information will come from.

Sample:

I have research from the Institutes/Royal Academies of X and Y on the ecological implications of the plastic used in these bags. This is not yet public. I will also draw from other information, such as global statistics, on various websites. X has written extensively on it and has agreed to a phone interview as has Y, the head of British Landfill. This is a subject that has always interested me. It is something that would appeal and interest your audience.