The Nut & Bolts of Activism

How To Talk Your Way Onto Cable TV Shows

With Growth in New Channels, Media Opportunities Abound

by Morey Stettner, *Investor's Business Daily*

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The new year will bring lots of new cable TV stations, from CNN as well as from NBC and ABC.

These ventures are going to need good programming. You can help supply it.

The first step—whether you're looking to influence public opinion, build visibility for your business or simply educate or entertain—is to propose yourself as a guest. That requires research to find the right shows to pitch.

With the growth of new cable channels, you need to stay tuned to the latest programming news. Discovery Communications, the Bethesda, Maryland-based parent of Discovery Channel and The Learning Channel, for example, plans to launch three new networks in January. They will focus on children, natural history and how-to/lifestyles.

New programs on fledgling stations are especially eager to land good guests. Watch interview shows and note the host's style, the programs's format and its overall tone and perspective. Also, consider the audience that the show targets.

The next step is to attract the interest of producers. Bookers at the most popular shows are inundated with ideas for guests, so getting on is a matter of luck and skill in setting yourself apart.

"We look for a specific hook that we can use to start off and interview," said Juan Aruego, segment producer of CNBC's "The Squawk Box," a daily morning show that invites about a dozen chief executives every week to discuss their businesses.

"It helps to have a breaking news item that affects your company or if you can connect your expertise to a larger story in the economy," he said.

Aruego recalls a conversation that led to his booking the head of a small semiconductor maker. "They contacted me, and I became interested in their new product, which was very easy for viewers to understand. They also told me about the big jump in their stock price, which I hadn't noticed before."

Like many producers, Aruego prefers to get mail from potential guests who make a clear, concise case for why they should be on the air. "If you call me, I'm probably going to ask you to send stuff anyway, and I read my mail," he said.

Your media kit should include a catchy cover letter, a one-page press release and a short biography that lists both your credentials and any previous media appearances. Also, include some sample questions that you could address in an interview. Because television relies on visual images, include eye-grabbing props or photographs that may accentuate the topic.

Follow up with a phone call after you send mail to the person who books guests. The best time to contact a producer of a live show is after it airs—not before or during that day's broadcast.

Bill Harrison, publisher of "Top National TV Talks Shows," warns people never to start a follow-up call by asking, "Did you get my media kit?" Instead, introduce yourself and quickly summarize your pitch. "You have less than 10 seconds to say why you would make a good guest for their show," he said.

Some shows have more than one staffer in charge of lining up guests. You need to know which producer is better suited to review your material and consider you for future shows.

"Try to identify if the show you want to be on has a beat system," said Eric Scholl, executive producer of CNNfn, a 24-hour financial news channel that debuted on December 29. "Also, know the current programming and suggest a way you can fit in. This helps give the assignment editor a frame of reference."

Scholl offers an example of a senior executive who tells a producer: "I'm chairman of a rail freight company, and I've noticed you've been discussing unions a lot lately on your show. I've been negotiating with unions, so perhaps I can share my experience on this issue."

Demonstrate that you are familiar with the program. Refer to past segments that you liked. Producers are more apt to book guests who already watch the show and who can capture the show's spirit. Morning talk programs, for instance, may want lively guests who can deliver uplifting news or practical advice. Issue-oriented shows may look for executives with strong opinions.

Once you're booked to appear, the producer may arrange a pre-interview. It serves as a short rehearsal, giving you a chance to suggest questions you can answer on the air.

"A pre-interview lets the booker know what you want to talk about," Aruego said. "It also helps you get an idea of the potential angles that the show may want to take with you. It can take only five minutes, and it's worth it."

Don't expect to be paid for your time as a guest. The best you can hope for is that the producer will send a limo to shuttle you to and from the studio. Other shows may reimburse you for cab fare.

With breaking news stories, you may not have to leave your home or office. A producer can schedule a live phone conversation with the show's host to get your opinion as events unfold.

"I know it's hard for some executives to be accessible, but that's really important," Scholl said. "We need to be able to reach you, so at least be available by phone."

TV Guides

Two resources to help you contact producers:

"The Top 200 TV Report"
(800-669-0773) Lists top 200 TV shows that do interviews. Includes producer names, phone numbers and tips on how to pitch them.

"Top National TV Talk Shows"
(800-989-1400) Program listings for all major TV talk shows. Includes producer names, phone numbers, beats and show profiles.

More Land Needed for Victims of Communism Museum Says AOB's Kevitt

WASHINGTON — In the last issue of *AOB News* (March/April) we reported that a fund-raising effort was underway to construct a major museum to the victims of communism. AOB member Mike Kevitt of Hickory, North Carolina, in a note to AOB president Ken West, made the following comment: "That new museum of the horrors of communism better be built on enough land to allow for a sizeable future addition: we still have China, North Korea, Cuba and Vietnam out there, maybe others I don't know about."

(Editor's note: A solution to the problem that Mr. Kevitt poses may have been found in—of all places—Bucharest, Romania! *The New York Times* (March 30, p. 2) reports that the People's Palace of former communist dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, is looking for a new tenant. According to *Times*' reporter Jane Perlez, "The house that Ceausescu built, said to be only slightly smaller than the Pentagon, dominates this city as a sour legacy....While Nicolae Ceausescu starved the people and let them freeze through hard winters, he ordered 700 architects to erect a so-called People's Palace with reception rooms the size of soccer fields and corridors as wide as streets."

Apparently there is now an international competition to find a use for this monument to evil. What better use than that of a museum to the victims of communist horror.

Taiwan Election A Major Threat To Communists Says Taiwan's New President

TAIPEI — In a far-ranging discussion with *The Wall Street Journal* (March 27, p. A22) Taiwan's first democratically elected President, Le Teng-hui, had much to say. When asked the meaning of mainland China's military intimidation during Taiwan's election, Lee said that "there is a vicious underlying motive. To the Chinese communist regime, whose 'power comes from the barrel of a gun,' there is no greater threat than the direct election across the Taiwan Strait."

When asked if it was possible for economic reform to exist without political reform, President Lee said, "Vigorous economic development leads to independent thinking. People hope to be able to fully satisfy their free will and see their rights fully protected. And then demand ensues for political reform. The vitality and energy such reform releases is the same force that drives economic growth. Thus, economic reform and political reform must progress together."

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