

do not pursue this route of fundraising. The internal barriers are usually a fear of asking and a discomfort with being in a position of having to personally make an ask. It is so much easier to write a grant proposal than to sit across a table from someone, look them in the eye, and ask for support.

Fact is, there is no more effective way to get a donation than to make a person-to-person request; and, if money is needed quickly, there is no faster way to get support. Close this book right now, go make a phone call to a relative, and there might be a check in the mail tomorrow! If a filmmaker wants to get very good at fundraising, the internal impediments to making an “ask” must be addressed. Often the fear of rejection or the discomfort with requesting support can be overcome by remembering why the project is being made in the first place, and the importance it has for its potential audience. The filmmaker must feel, deep down, that the world will be a much better place once the film is completed.

One other upside to approaching individuals for support is that this type of fundraising has a healthy byproduct — it forces filmmakers to interact with the community, and brings the filmmaker face to face with a funder. When the check gets handed over, the donation becomes “personal” and the connection between the filmmaker and the funder is so much more real than when a grant is received through the mail. I recommend that the novice fundraiser conduct some role-playing exercises with friends to help practice asking scenarios and to begin to find some comfort level with dealing directly with donors.

THE PITCH

One of the very basic tools needed for all the fundraising avenues is the pitch — a very short statement that tells the listener what the film is about, who it is for, what is interesting or unusual about it, and that helps generate a conversation. How long should the pitch be? My recommendation is **no more than twenty seconds!** In other words, just long enough to pass the rigors of the infamous “elevator test”:

If someone got on an elevator with me and asked what I was working on, could I interest them in my project before they reached the next floor?

If your pitch does not pass this test, it needs more work. Filmmakers often make the mistake of putting together lengthy descriptions of their projects and fail to remain sensitive to the fact that most people make up their minds about things very quickly. The listener has decided within a matter of seconds whether or not he is bored or intrigued by the filmmaker and the project being pitched. If the listener is bored, then talking for more than a minute is not going to help your cause. If the listener is intrigued, then the very best thing a filmmaker can do is to pause and allow questions so that a dialogue — and not a monologue — can take place.

Early in the project, create a short and exciting pitch that can be used in any and all settings. The pitch will get used thousands of times before the project is completed. There is no one perfect formula for creating a pitch because of the tremendous variety of projects and personalities. However, there are some guidelines that can help create a dynamic pitch. The screenwriter and author William Goldman (*Adventures in the Screen Trade*) gives some good advice about pitching:

- ◆ Be passionate
- ◆ Identify the audience
- ◆ Never forget whom you are talking to
- ◆ Be brief
- ◆ Remember you are not telling a story — you are throwing out a hook
- ◆ Keep it simple
- ◆ One or two lines
- ◆ Grab them
- ◆ Pitch ten times a day

In a *New York Times* interview (January 2, 2003), the producer Ismail Merchant (*Howard's End*, *Remains of the Day*) says the following about his talent for separating people from their money to finance a film: "It is, he said, a matter of 'injecting your enthusiasm about something you are doing, which you feel is so exceptional that it would be a pleasure for someone to be involved in it.'"

One of the most accomplished "pitchers" I know is independent filmmaker/producer Paul Devlin. Here are the pitches he used for three of his movies:

Super Star Dumb (www.superstardumbmovie.com)

Super Star Dumb is a musical comedy about the broken promise of middle-class rock and roll stardom, following the story of a man punished by his talent in a society where anything short of celebrity is failure.

Power Trip (www.powertriptomovie.com)

Power Trip is about corruption, assassination, and street rioting over electricity in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia. It follows the story of an American company trying to solve the crisis there, but instead getting crushed by post-Soviet chaos.

BLAST! (www.blastthemovie.com)

BLAST! is about astrophysics Indiana Jones style! The story follows my brother, Mark Devlin, as he leads a tenacious team of scientists on the adventure of a lifetime from Arctic Sweden to the desolate ice of Antarctica to launch a revolutionary new telescope on a NASA high-altitude balloon to discover how the galaxies formed.

BLAST! is about the crazy lives of scientists. Their professional obsessions, personal and family sacrifices, and philosophical and religious questioning all give emotional resonance to a spectacular and suspenseful story of space exploration.

PAUL DEVLIN'S PITCH ON PITCHING



Like many filmmakers, at first I had a hard time pitching my own projects. But I soon realized that I would forever be explaining what my movies were about, both in high-stress selling environments and casually to friends and acquaintances. So I decided I might as well get good at it. Here are some insights I've developed for successful pitching.

1. Distill your pitch

One or two sentences should be enough to get across the bare essence of any movie. Once you've done that you can layer and elaborate. But if

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PAUL DEVLIN'S PITCH ON PITCHING (cont.)

the first one or two sentences cannot stand alone, then you don't know your movie well enough yet. Developing the shortest pitch will help you understand your movie better. And that will help you communicate this more effectively to others, especially when you may have only a few short moments to capture someone's attention.

Notice that the pitch for *Super Star Dumb* is only one sentence — it leaves out narrative detail in favor of emphasis on theme, which resonates on its own, consistently generating empathy and discussion.

2. Layer your pitch

After you capture someone's attention, be prepared to develop and to embellish your pitch with more layers. The first sentence of the *Power Trip* pitch could stand alone if that's all that's required. But if there is opportunity, delivery of the second part builds more of the narrative elements.

Because of its science content, *BLAST!* has been mistakenly dismissed as marginal or "niche" by programmers. So the second part of that pitch corrects this preconception, emphasizing elements that demonstrate its appeal to a wider audience.

3. Start your pitch strong

Powerful and compelling words first. Draw them in right away.

After many false starts with words like "electricity," "Communism," and "Capitalism" for my *Power Trip* pitch, I found my best start was with these elements: "Corruption, assassination and street rioting..." No problem getting people's attention with those words.

Consider dropping words that may engender undesirable connotations. Notice *Super Star Dumb* uses "musical comedy" instead of "documentary." Expanding the conventional genre designation in this way is liberating and much more colorful.

I allow the word "scientist" in the pitch for *BLAST!* but the word "science" is deadly for programmers, so I make an effort to avoid it. "Space exploration" plays much better.

4. Memorize your pitch

No stumbling allowed! Memorizing your pitch gives you confidence always to discuss your movie assertively. Write out the pitch and then recite it over and over whenever you have the opportunity. If there are tough spots, consider a re-write to make it easier to memorize.

5. Feel your pitch

The pitfall of memorization is that, if you're not careful, it can make your pitch sound rote and hackneyed. Find ways to enliven your memorized pitch with enthusiasm so that you can inspire others. Acting classes help! (Recommended for filmmakers anyway.)

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PAUL DEVLIN'S PITCH ON PITCHING (cont.)

6. Slow down your pitch

Now that you've got your pitch distilled and memorized, there's plenty of time, no need to rush. Slow down. Now pause. Give your listener a moment to absorb what you just said. Now pitch them the rest. If you are asked to repeat it, then you know you've delivered it too fast. (*continues*)

7. Evolve your pitch

As the movie and its distribution evolve, so does your pitch. You learn a lot about your movie as people respond to it. Steal copy from reviews and film festival blurbs and allow the best language to inform your pitch.

For example, the first line of my pitch for *BLAST!* — “astrophysics Indiana Jones style” — came straight from the description in the Sheffield Film Festival catalog.

8. Enjoy your pitch

Once you master the above, pitching becomes fun! Watching your listener's eyes widen in genuine interest at your movie is very gratifying. Ideally, you will inspire a lively discussion with your effective pitch.

Good luck, and good pitching!

A participant in one of my workshops told a story about the power a good pitch can have in almost any type of setting. The filmmaker was standing in line at a grocery store waiting to check out. The line was pretty long, and she ended up having a conversation with the man just behind her. At one point he asked her what she did for a living. She replied, “I’m a filmmaker.” “Oh,” he replied, “what an interesting profession. What are you working on now?” It was at this point that she used her pitch for a documentary she was doing that took place in Turkey. “My gosh,” said the man, “I’m from Turkey! Tell me more about your project.” The man asked for her business card before paying for his groceries. Three weeks later the filmmaker received a five-figure donation for her project. Never underestimate the power of a well-crafted pitch, and be ready to pitch *any-and-everywhere*.

QUALIFY THE DONOR

Once a list of possible donors has been identified (see my instructions for this in Chapter Two), the next important step is to “qualify”