

CBC & ELAN

“GETTING MEDIA ATTENTION” WORKSHOP



ELAN recently partnered with CBC Montreal to host the “Getting Media Attention” workshop for ELAN members. On January 27, 2015, 18 ELAN members arrived at the CBC headquarters and were led to a conference room just big enough to accommodate everyone. Participants helped themselves to coffee and cookies while CBC Quebec Communications Manager Debbie Hynes and her colleague, Meredith Dellandrea (Content Manager, Arts and Digital), prepared to begin.

After everyone was settled, Debbie opened the floor, introducing herself and her role at CBC as the promoter and publicist of provincial and local daily shows on the radio, TV, and web. Meredith introduced herself as the leader of several CBC arts and digital teams including Arts Journalists, Arts Montreal and Radio Network Programs.

The workshop catered to artists who are interested in gaining marketing and promotion skills to advance their practices by acquiring media attention. The participants were presented with an overview of tips and tricks for grounding themselves in the world of traditional media. We’ve summarized some of those tips in the pages to follow.

The Pitch

Picture yourself entering an elevator with a journalist. Your challenge is to deliver a clear and concise pitch of your project in the 10-20 seconds it takes for the elevator to descend to the 1st floor. It is an act of persuasion, one of many acts of persuasion by other artists vying for attention, so it is critical that you make yourself stand out. However, you must also keep in mind that the journalists themselves must persuade a third party, such as the executive producer of a TV program, to engage in the idea that you have pitched.



The Newsroom

The first thing to consider in developing your pitch is the person to whom you are pitching. That person is one of the many branches that makes up the huge oak tree known as the newsroom. Identify the producer of the radio or television show that interests you. This is the person who makes editorial decisions for the program. The assignment editor in the newsroom is responsible for tracking new stories and news releases for that day, and assigning reporters to cover them. To be featured on a show, contact the producer; in the news, the assignment editor. You should also become familiar with the person in charge of the Arts department in a particular

media organization. At CBC, the key figures in the newsroom that would be of interest to artists include:

- ◆ Jeanette Kelly – Arts reporter
<http://www.cbc.ca/mediacentre/jeanette-kelly-1.html>
- ◆ Julia Caron – Arts researcher for radio (based in Quebec City)
- ◆ Morgan Dunlop - Radio and TV news

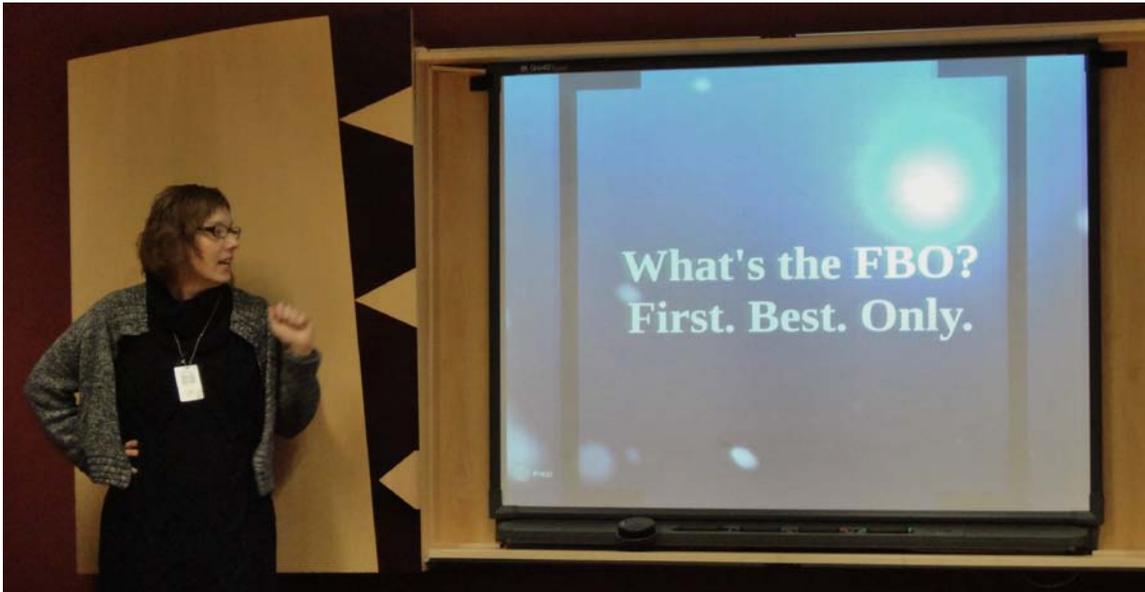
Your Audience

You must know the audience of your chosen media organization and program before you approach them. For example, are they public broadcasters? And which language do they broadcast in? The media organization is only interested in supporting content that appeals to their regular audience, so keep that in mind when you pitch your project. Better yet, know the audience you want to reach, and contact a media organization and program that already caters to that audience. Ensure that you and the organization have shared values.



Your Story

Now you know who you have to talk to, but how do you deliver a story that will attract them? Media researchers and producers want to know the focus of your story. There has to be a person doing something for a reason for the journalist to be able to tell a story that the target audience will connect with. In your pitch, you need to clarify who is at the heart of the story, whether it be the subject of your photography, an actor in your theatre production, or simply yourself. Envision how this story will be told. Whose voice will be heard on the radio? Who will be seen in the program on TV? Focusing your story refines the elevator pitch.



FBO - First. Best. Only.

Journalists frame their stories based on what is new, what has changed, or what has never happened before. If your story is the first of its kind, the best of its kind, or the only one available for sharing right now, emphasize that in your pitch. Keep FBO in mind when shaping your focus in order to attract the journalist's attention.

Timing

When do you approach a media organization? The timing of sending your pitch depends on the kind of program you are reaching out to. If it is a daily show, decisions are made within 1-2 days, so pitches sent too far in advance could get thrown on the back burner. However, 1-2 weeks in advance is best for a weekly show, and 1-2 months in advance is best for a monthly show.

Different programs have different start dates, so familiarize yourself with the date your target program starts a new season. Having pitched your story months in advance for a monthly show, you can send a “save the date” email to let the researcher know the event is coming up two weeks ahead, put in your media release for the event a week ahead, invite the researcher to the exhibition of your project two days ahead, and send out a confirmation email the day before the event.

Journalists are excited by the new and the changing, so they will pay more attention to the project as things actually start happening. If time is against you, you must make it clear in the subject line how urgent your message is, for example, by including the production date. However, do not ambush the journalist with a daily email until you receive a response. Plan ahead!



Relationship

More important than mastering the timing is building a rapport with the journalist. The average journalist receives a minimum of 100 emails per day, so if they know you and have seen your work, they will pay more attention to your email out of the onslaught of their inbox. If they are not interested in your pitch, they do not have the time to reply with a “No, sorry, we do not wish to participate,” and so you get lost in the crowd, unsure of whether you will hear back.

Get to know the specialization of the journalist. Mention your admiration of a piece they have already done, and show that you know what they do and how it coincides with what you do. The focus of your story should be at the heart of your pitch, but don't be afraid to tweak it according to the particular field of the journalist to show that you are well-informed.

Try to establish a relationship outside of the particular project you are trying to promote. Expose the journalist to your work by inviting them to your gallery or your concert. In this way, the journalist can get to know you and your work without the pressure of having to do a piece on it, so by the time you're ready to ask them for help, they will be more likely to say “yes.”



Tools

The tools at your disposal for getting media attention depend on the kind of art you do. If your work is visual, you should integrate photos, videos, or links to videos on Vimeo or YouTube into your pitch. If your work is written, you could focus on writing an excellent media release that describes your project in a compelling way. Nowadays, media organizations and journalists have accounts on social media, so you could post a brief synopsis of your project or ask a question on their page to gain their attention.



Dinner Party Litmus Test

If you can share the idea for your project with friends and family around the dinner table and they lean in, chances are your pitch is refined enough that it garners attention, prompting people to WANT to know more. If your pitch fails to do this, perhaps it needs more refinement. The feedback from your friends and colleagues could help to finalize your pitch before you pick up the phone or draft that email.

Quick Tips

- ◆ Treat the subject line of your email like a new writer would treat their headline. Writing the subject line may even take as much time as writing the pitch.
- ◆ If the media organization sees that there is engagement with an idea or event from their audience on social media, they will pay more attention. This indicates that the intended community is already interested in your work, which will make the journalist interested as well.
- ◆ Keep the interests and target audience of the media organization in mind and tweak your pitch accordingly. Amendments should also be made according to the scale of your audience, such as local vs. national vs. regional.
- ◆ Your chosen method of getting your work out to the public should rely heavily on the nature of your work. If your project is a series of paintings for example, you should definitely use visual means to get attention. Take photos or record a video of the creative process as you work on the paintings.
- ◆ A journalist is usually only attentive to the first two sentences of a press release, so it must be concise. The media package with all the information regarding your project can be many pages long, but the press release must quickly relay the WOW factor of your project.
- ◆ Communicate the central ideas you want the public to capture from stumbling upon your work, and try to make it appeal to art enthusiasts as well as the “not-so-artsy” layman.
- ◆ Although there are many means of communication, email is still the best tool for getting in touch with journalists.
- ◆ Set up your own social media page for your project, such as a Facebook event, where you can promote the event, post updates, share links and images, and communicate directly with your followers.
- ◆ After successfully getting a journalist to write a piece on your project, share it on your social media networks. It is important to mention the journalist’s name in addition to the name of the media organization.

- ◆ Maintain your relationship with the journalist. Exchange emails regularly, express gratitude, and update them on the success of your project and new ideas you may have.
- ◆ The earlier in the week you contact the journalist, the better. Everyone is more alert on a Monday than on a Thursday when they are looking forward to the weekend.
- ◆ Traditional media companies do not broadcast videos or publish articles that have not been produced by employees of the organization. Outside content may be incorporated into the organization's digital platform, granted they obtain the rights to do so. However, content concerning coverage of your project that has been recorded, edited, written, etc by an external source will not be put on TV or radio programs.
- ◆ Apart from the event, offer the journalist an exclusive look at something rare or new related to your idea. The journalist cares not only about the event, but also the subject, the artist, the people involved, and the process of creating the work.
- ◆ To contact CBC about a project you would like to pitch, select a program that interests you from the "Programs" link below, and go to the "Contact Us" link on the show's page: <http://www.cbc.ca/montreal/programs/>