

Money begets money

I am by no means a newcomer to the television industry, having spent a good six years of my life working for a successful production house, but like most people I realised that the time to 'go it alone' had come and I'm giving it my best shot. The thing that confounds me the most tho', is the submission process.

By law all broadcasters are required to commission their broadcast content and to give the SABC their dues, they do indeed do that, but the fact that you have to sign away your intellectual property before you say a word to them, is quite disconcerting to say the least.

If you've been lucky enough to get a foot in the door without having to take the Commissioning Editor out for an expensive power lunch, you'll find that they give you your half hour and promise to stay in touch and as some people have found, they never do. Shockingly though, they do find their ideas or bastardised versions thereof on television but being produced by either Red Pepper, Rapid Blue, Endemol or Urban Brew.

Now speaking of the above mentioned production houses, I KNOW that they needn't wait for the new commissioning briefs like the rest of us young upstarts, no, they can waltz in the doors of broadcastdom and give a five minute schpiel on an 'idea' they have and the next thing you know - new TV show. I've been there with my former bosses and it's amazing to watch how these people make money over a cup of coffee and a chuckle.

How is it that M*NET can sometimes send out a commissioning brief internally? There we have 'Show me the mommy' produced by, wait for it...the Carte Blanche producers. Supersport is notorious for dealing with their preferred 'mates' and the rest of us are not given the time of day because 'they have enough on their plate already'. Through personal experience I've attempted to set up a meeting with the Supersport honchos to pitch an unsolicited idea and their response was 'yes we're interested but no need to come in, leave your idea at reception'...true story.

Trying to get a pitch in at ETV is something that confounds most individuals so we won't even go there.

Now let's get to the Commissioning Editors. How qualified are they to sit there and lord it over producers, when some if not most of them have no idea what you're talking about? Surely a person assigned to a position of that stature should be on point when it comes to popular culture. They should consume and process as much information as a voracious sixteen year old addicted to DSTV, cellphones, the internet and Heat magazine would. So when I go in there and use a media reference such as Johnny Knoxville or Raj 1 and Raj 2, I expect the person who decides my creative future to laugh and go 'those idiots' at least, not 'are these South Africans we're talking about?'.

I know this may sound like the rantings of a disgruntled producer but I'm comforted by the fact that I am not alone. People have been turned away because they are not black empowered and having black females on your team is 'not empowerment' even though your team has three people, others have been turned away because they're too small and may not deliver and some people's ideas never get to see the light of day. I need to know if I should continue to push or do I give up because I cannot afford to pay the price of success, the old adage says 'money begets money' or 'money talks and bullshit walks' and the more I watch television and listen to people who feel as I do, it seems to me like I'm walking.

Does anyone out there have the answer? Enlighten us all without charging us a subscription fee, 'cos at the end of the day we're in this together, right?