

How To Pitch A Virtual Series And Look Like A Pro

By MJ Calder

As the VPN rises in the ranks of virtual entertainment sites it's going to attract more people, and, in turn, more pitches. More pitches means more competition, so if you really want your show to have the best chance of getting picked up it's going to need a stellar pitch. You'll need to create something that will stand out from all the rest, not only in terms of content but also design.

Having pitched a series and had it successfully picked up, I'd like to think I know what I'm talking about as far as the pitching process goes. That said, this is a completely subjective article and everything suggested should be taken as just that, a suggestion. In other words, this is what has worked for me (and some other people) and I'm happy to share my knowledge to try to help you take your pitch from average to outstanding.

So, disclaimers and such out of the way, let's get to the business end of things: Creating a pitch!

STEP 1

Meeting Requirements And Other Boring (But Necessary) Information

The VPN, like a lot of other virtual series sites, has a couple of requirements that you must fulfill before your pitch is even considered to be picked up. Now don't freak out! It's not like there's some crazy obstacle course you need to complete to prove your worth. All the requirements are actually pretty simple.

First, you need to be an active member of the forum. See, that's not too hard, is it? This means you need to have a registered account on the forum, which takes care of the member part, and posted at least fifteen times before making your pitch, which takes care of the active part.

Pro tip 1: Try not to make those fifteen posts pointless one sentence replies to random things. Yes, it's one way to get to fifteen posts but what we really want to see with those fifteen posts is you integrating yourself into the community and not spamming just you can post your pitch ASAP. Try reading and reviewing some of the existing series on the VPN instead, it makes the showrunners happy and shows you're willing to get involved and make a commitment.

The second, and really only other, requirement is that you have the time and skill to run a virtual series.

Virtual series are hard work. Trust me, I know. Your standard virtual series season is generally twelve episodes, each episode consisting of a fifty to sixty page script of approximately 10,000 words. That means for one season you're looking at writing at least 120,000 words. That's longer than a lot of novels (if you want a comparison I believe the first Harry Potter book was somewhere around 75,000 words). So make sure to think long and hard about pitching a series if you don't think you can handle all that work.

If you still want to have your own show but aren't sure if you can handle a full series just yet, why not try pitching your idea as a mini-series or a webisode series? They're a good way of getting your feet wet and testing your own ability at commitment and writing before you jump straight into the deep end.

Now, there's a little more info on all this in the How to Pitch A Series thread in the pitching area.

I would strongly suggest (and if you're serious about pitching a series you should have already done this) reading that so you know all that is required of you.

Anyway, now that we have the boring stuff out of the way, let's get into what you all want to know about: Pitching your series like a pro.

STEP 2

Your Concept Is Sort Of Important (I Lied, It's Really Important)

Now to how all pitches begin, an idea! Your pitch could be the prettiest and most shiny pitch around but if your idea isn't a good one you're not going to get very far. In other words, your pitch can have a pretty face but without personality it's not going to keep people interested.

Unfortunately I can't give you a good idea or show you how to get one. I can, however, tell you what to avoid when it comes to ideas for virtual series, at least on the VPN.

1. Avoid carbon copies of shows that are/have already been on TV, just with a different name and different

faces. It's not creative and everyone's seen it before. People want to see something new and different, not the same ideas with nothing more than a new hat to make them special. If you really, really, *really* want to have a show like one that's already been on TV I'd suggest either a spin-off or continuation, but we'll have more on spin-offs and continuations later.

2. Avoid shows that are carbon copies of shows already on the VPN. "But it's different because look at it's new hat!" you'll say. No. We want unique. Unique pitches will always garner more attention than ones we've seen before, true fact.

3. Avoid a prequel, spin-off, or continuation of a VPN show. Unless you have express permission from the showrunner/creator of a VPN series you may not make a prequel, spin-off, or continuation of a VPN series. And if you think I'm being silly: this has actually happened before. Just don't do it guys.

4. Avoid shows set in the same universe as shows already on the VPN, especially for prequels, spin-offs, continuations, or reimagining's of other media. There's only so many pre-existing universes to go around and if someone beat you to it that's too bad. For example, I know comics are super awesome and all that but between the shows currently in the VPN line up, Marvel and DC are pretty much off limits. It's not a matter of us trying to crush your awesome idea, it's more a matter of we can't have a Batman in every other series. Also, by setting your series in the same universe as another series you limit the opportunities both of you have to use characters and storylines.

Pro Tip 2 (Bonus Point 5): Now, this isn't exactly off limits but we need to talk about spin-offs and continuations of TV shows. While they can be done successfully I would, personally, suggest steering away from them. For continuations especially, consider that a lot of cancelled shows are cancelled for a reason. If the show you loved had at least four seasons I think we can agree that it had it's run. Rather than continuing it in a virtual series form you should focus on some of your OWN ideas instead. As for spin-offs, I still think creating your own series from scratch is much more satisfying. Spin-offs can, and will, work (as the VPN has shown) but we do want this to be a virtual series site, not a fanfiction site. As far as I'm concerned, original ideas trump everything, every time.

So now that you know what not to do, get that brain working and come up with the coolest concept for a show that you can and start planning! Yes, it's harder than working off something pre-existing but it's much more rewarding and will probably get more attention than an idea people are already familiar with.

STEP 3

Word Vomit (A.K.A. Starting To Write Your Pitch)

So you have your idea, you've got the characters, the episode plans, your production notes... It's pitch time! With all your wordy words of awesomeness you're going to show those big shots on the VPN what a real series is made of. But, oh... that actually wasn't as many words as you expected it to be, and this text doesn't look nearly as exciting as you thought it would. That's depressing. Now what?

Fear not, my friend, I'm now going to take you, step by step and with picture examples, through the process I use to assemble a killer pitch.

STEP 4

Formatting Instructions (That Even My Mum Was Able To Understand)

Listen up, I'm gonna teach you some important internet skills (I was going to type skills with a 'z' but my inner grammar/spelling geek wouldn't let me). If you want your pitch to look good (and not be a giant paragraph of boring text) you need to know how to do a bit of formatting/coding on the forum. Here are most the basics:

BOLD

Bolding, it's when text is darker and thicker than the surrounding text to make it stand out. Bolding is great for titles and headers and, to a lesser extent, emphasizing a specific word. To bold something all you need to do when posting is this:

[b]The words here will be bold.[/b]

Italics

Italics are when text is slanted. For example, if you want to put emphasis on particular words or stress a change in tone you use italics. Italics are also good for quotes. To put something in italics you do this when posting:

[i]The words here will be italicized.[/i]

Underline

Underlining is pretty self-explanatory: it puts a line under your text. Again, this is usually for emphasis. Underlining is good for emphasizing single words and also titles or headings. Underlining generally works well with bolded text too, if you really need to make something stand out. To underline you simply use the underline tag while posting:

[u]Words here will be underlined.[/u]

Centering Text

Sometimes titles or small paragraphs of text look better when they're centered on the page. Text is generally left aligned so to move it to the center of the page use this code:

[center]The words here will be centered on the page.[/center]

Pro Tip 4: For those of use who use British spelling (which I generally do because I'm an Aussie), please note the spelling when coding is 'center' not 'centre'.

Font Changes

Font changes are good for titles and headers, occasionally quotes. Different fonts can be nice for headings but remember, the majority of you writing should be in an easy to read font to avoid people's eyes bleeding as they try and make out the paragraph you've written in a ridiculously fancy font. To change the font simply use this while posting:

[font=font name here]These words will be in your selected font.[/font]

Pro Tip 4: Note that not all fonts show up on all computers. To make things easier for you I've got a little list here of the most common fonts (one that will show up on most computers) so you can see what they look like and don't have to go searching for a list on your own.

Arial
Comic Sans
Courier New
Georgia
Impact
Lucida Console
Palatino Linotype
Times New Roman
Verdana

Color Changes

Color changes are also awesome for titles/headings and making things stand out. To change the color of your font you use this code:

[color=#####]Text in here will be colored.[/color]

Pro Tip 5: Again, for those of use who use British spelling, please note the spelling when coding is 'color'.

There are two ways to specify the color of your text. You can replace the '#####' with the word of the color you want (the tag for color on the VPN post editor does it this way) or you can use a color code.

The standard colors that you can specify by name on The VPN are: black, red, yellow, pink, green, orange, purple, blue, beige, brown, teal, navy, maroon, limegreen.

If you're picky, like me, and want a specific shade of purple, or red, or any other color, you'll need to use hex color codes. These are six-letter/number combinations that can give you pretty much any shade of any color you could ever want. If you want a list of all (or pretty much all) the color codes you'll ever need I recommend this page. The color codes you want are found in the 'hex' column:

<http://cloford.com/resources/colours/500col.htm>

Text Size Change

Sometimes, no matter how much you bold and color a piece of text, it just doesn't stand out how you want it too. Other times you have a bit of text that needs to be less noticeable than everything else. So what do you do? Change the text size. This one is easy, just use this code:

[size=#]Text here will change size.[/size]

Where the '#' is, just replace it with a number according to how big or small you want the text. Standard text size on the VPN is '2'.

Images

Yay for pictures! Now, the VPN doesn't require you to have pictures or graphics but I personally think they make the pitch look nicer. So if you have the means to create graphics or pictures (or have a friend who can do it for you), go for it!

To get an image onto your pitch you first need to upload the picture from your computer to an image-hosting site. Once you've uploaded your image to the image hosting site of your choice, get the image URL (or web address or whatever you call it) and put it between these tags:

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[img]image url goes here[/img]
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This will make your image show up on the page without linking to anywhere else or re-sizing itself and generally being stupid and not pretty.

Pro Tip 6: My personal recommendation for an image-hosting site is <http://photobucket.com>. It's free, pretty easy to use, and has worked fantastically for me for years.

The last thing you need to know is that a lot of these formatting codes can be used together, and you can even have three or four different elements applied to one piece of text. For example, you can bold *and* underline text by doing this:

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[b][u]Text here is bolded and underlined.[/u][/b]
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And that covers the basics of how to format your pitch! Yes, there are more things you can do but these are the basics and pretty much the only things you need to know in order to design a pitch like a pro.

STEP 5

Why Is This So Bloody Hard To Think Of!? (The Title)

First let us start with the title of your series. This generally goes at the start of your pitch (though you could put it at the end if you want, don't let me cramp your style).

Your title is the first thing people are going to see of your pitch so you need to make it good. It needs to represent the feeling of your show and be something that once people read the pitch will start to immediately associate with your idea. It's also a good idea to make sure your title hasn't already been used by a popular TV series or book. That's not to say that you can't have the same title as anything else, but if it's already well known you're going to have readers associating that title with more than just your concept!

Example time:

The first title example is from the virtual series *The Outcasts*. While *The Outcasts* can be considered a popular or generic title, it immediately resonates with the show's concept. It's also a snappy title and gives you a good idea of what the show is going to be about before you even start reading the summary.

The second title example is from the virtual series *Edge of Vision*. *Edge of Vision* is a more unusual title but still accomplishes the same things that *The Outcasts* does as a title. It evokes a sense mystery, which is a big part of the series, and also alludes to the powers of certain characters who can see and sense things that others in the series can't. It shows how a title can be used to tell you things about a series before you even read the summary.

STEP 6

OMG What Is Summarising (The Synopsis/Premise)

If your title is the bait, the synopsis is the hook that's going to actually catch people's attention and keep it. Your synopsis is where you describe your show concept and introduce your main characters and what they'll be doing. You can generally break your synopsis down into four parts:

1. The quote (optional).

This is normally something before the main body of your synopsis. It can be a general quote of your own making that your feel sums up your series, a famous quote, a quote from one of the characters in your series, etc. They are a cool way to introduce readers to your idea but not required, so don't fret if you don't have one or can't think of one.

Example time:

This is a quote from the beginning of the pitch for virtual series *Bitten*. It is an example of a character quote and is a fun way to get the ball rolling on your pitch.

2. History of the series.

The next section of your synopsis should introduce the pitch reader to the world you have created. Give us some background, give us the main ideas. Your show doesn't just start in a void so let us know the events that led up to the point in time where your series begins.

Example time:

This example is from the pitch of the virtual series *Sailor Moon*. It give you all the background you need to know without giving away any big plot points, yet is still detailed and leads you in to where the series begins.

3. What's happening and who it's happening to.

The next part is where you introduce the events that are happening at the beginning of your series and the characters that are going to be focused on. Give us a short description as to why the characters are doing the things they're doing at the start of the series and then go on to explain some of the challenges they're going to be facing throughout the first season.

Pro Tip 7: A pitch is always going to be a bit spoilery so you need to find that good balance between giving as much information as possible without completely revealing everything. The fallback of not giving enough information in this synopsis section is that the pitch committee and VPN admins are not going to get a clear idea of your series and are going to assume that you also don't have a clear idea of your series and that it needs more development.

Example time:

This example is from the pitch for the virtual series *Watchtower*. It effectively introduces the main characters and their role in the series. It also gives a good, fairly detailed overview of the direction the first season is going to take.

4. Overview of the show style.

This section is mainly for the pitch committee and VPN admins but can also be of interest to general readers. Here is where you tell people what the genre is, if it is hour episodes or half hour episodes, how many episodes the season will have, if it is serialized or procedural, and so on. This gives people a look into the more technical side of your series.

Example time:

This example is from the pitch for virtual series *Bitten*.

Remember! This is just a guide on how to structure your synopsis. Ideally you'll include all these elements but they don't need to be in this particular order or separated into specific sections. For example, some people like to blend the 'history' and 'what's happening' sections into one and others like to make them separate paragraphs. As long as you have all the information you can, theoretically, display it any way you want.

STEP 7

The Pretty Faces And Who's Who Of Your Virtual Series (Characters & Cast)

The next section to include in your pitch is your cast and characters section. This is usually split into two parts: main characters and minor/recurring characters.

Main characters are the characters that appear in majority of your episodes throughout the season and have substantial roles. I generally consider a character a main character if they appear in more than 3/4 of the episodes in the season, or, alternatively, less than 3/4 but more than 1/2 with a lot of screen time. This, of course, will differ for each showrunner but it's a good idea to not make your main cast too large from the get go.

The second section is minor or recurring characters. These are characters who appear in multiple episodes but

not enough to consider them main cast, or characters who appear in majority of the episodes but only in a very small role. If you have a lot of minor characters I would suggest just sticking to the most important ones to show in your pitch. Remember, if your show does get picked up you'll always have the opportunity to expand on your cast list then.

Now that we've got main and recurring cast sorted out we can move on to developing the cast and character section further. Two important pieces of information are given in this section: the actors and actresses you would cast in your series and the detailed character descriptions. Since you need to know what your characters are like before choosing a suitable actor or actress, I'll begin by taking you through the character development side of things.

To start your main character section select your first main character (I generally do this in order of which characters are likely to get the most screen time) and write down their name. Then you should include a paragraph description of your character. Remember that good characters are going to make people want to know more about your series and keep them interested. So, make us want to know about these people! In your character description paragraph it is a good idea to include as many of the following elements as possible:

- Character's full name and any nicknames/aliases they may have
- Some elements of their personality
- Any outstanding skills or special abilities
- What they are currently doing in life
- Some of their background or history
- What's planned for their future

Repeat this for each of your main characters. Recurring characters probably don't need as much detail in their descriptions but if you want to write a whole paragraph for them too, go for it!

Example time:

This example is from the pitch for the virtual series *Edge of Vision*. It gives us some character background, gives us an idea of her personality, and also hints at what she's going to be facing in the future.

Now that you've got the important information for the characters you can move on to your casting. Somewhere in your character description (I often put it next to or near the character name) put down the name of the actor or actress your character is being portrayed by. If possible, it's always nice to include a picture of the actor/actress but it's not compulsory.

Pro Tip 8: Try to pick actors and actresses that not only look like your characters but would also do a good job if they were actually cast for the role. It can really help people to picture the characters better.

Example time:

This example is from the pitch for virtual series *Edge of Vision*. This is an example that includes the actor that has been cast for the role.

Pro Tip 9: When selecting a cast for your series try to be creative. There's no rule on the VPN that forbids you from using the same actor or actress that someone else is using but it's common courtesy to try to avoid using the main cast from other VPN series as the main cast in your own. It's also strongly suggested that you get your actors and actresses from a variety of shows or movies. It's not very original to use three or four people who have already starred in a TV series or movie together.

STEP 8

More Summarising (Episode List)

The episode list is the next big section of your pitch. You don't need to have a description for every single episode but I would recommend five at minimum, preferably the first five. The pilot episode description is a must.

First off, list your first episode (episode 1.01, where the first number represents the season and the numbers after the point represent the episode number, sometime also written as 1x01 or just 101) and its title. Some people like to include pictures for each episode but, again, this is not necessary for your pitch to be picked up, some people just like doing it because it looks pretty. The most important part is your episode description. This is usually a small paragraph that describes what happens in the episode.

Example time:

An example from the pitch of virtual series *Watchtower*, showing the pilot episode description.

An example from the pitch of virtual series *The Outcasts*, showing the description for episode three.

Do this for some (or all) of the episodes of your first season and you're done with the episode guide. Remember, episodes are often subject to change so if you're not happy with the description or title, or you're just not sure if you're going to want the episode later on, don't worry! It's not set in stone. You're free to change your episodes around and re-name them as much as you want later on, but having a rough description, even if you don't think you'll stick with it later down the track, is better than no description at all.

Pro Tip 10: The more episode descriptions you can supply the better, and descriptions are more important than the titles. Someone who can display ideas, even if it's only a sentence or two for some of the episodes, for their whole season shows that they have a good grasp of their series and have developed it sufficiently before pitching.

STEP 9

And All The Other Stuff (Creator's Notes)

The last section of your pitch should be your creator's notes (if you have any). This is also optional. If there are any extra things you need to add to your pitch it goes here. Generally creator's notes have anything the pitcher wants the pitch committee or admins to know and can also include plans for the future of the series beyond the first season.

STEP 10

Read More Please (Posting Your Pitch)

Now that you have everything in order it's time to actually post your pitch on the VPN's Virtual Series Pitches board. To do this you simply select 'create a new thread' and away you go!

It's important to note that you should only be posting into the main Virtual Series Pitches board if your pitch is completed or very near to completed. If you want to post your half finished pitch and get some feedback on what you have so far, the VPN has a sub-board in the Virtual Series Pitches section called Undeveloped Pitches.

STEP 11

PDF Mania (Hosting Your Scripts And Attaching Your Pilot Episode)

The last step in creating your pitch is to add your pilot episode. On the VPN you are required to have your pilot episode written and available for view by the pitch committee and VPN admins. Until you have your pilot episode attached to your pitch you can get comments and feedback but it will not be considered for pick up, so make sure to get your pilot episode done as soon as possible!

So once you written your pilot script on whatever program it is you use, you need to save it as a PDF file. Then all you have to do is upload the PDF to a host and then put the link somewhere in you pitch. Generally placing the link with the pilot episode description is the way to go.

Pro tip 11: To upload all my script PDFs I use the free website host <http://weebly.com>. You simply create an account and upload your files to your personal weebly website.

STEP 12

I've Run Out Of Fancy Titles (Conclusion)

And that's it. You've finished reading my guide on How To Pitch A Virtual Series And Look Like A Pro! My last piece of advice before you go off and pitch your idea is to make use of the Pitches That Made It board.

The pitches on this board have all resulted in the series being picked up by the VPN and will give you some more ideas on how to create and structure your own pitch.

So run free my students, and let's see some of your awesome pitches on the VPN!