

# Winging it at Banff

I had just parted with yet another potential executive producer on my documentary, *Coming Through the Apocalypse*, and was all but ready to pack it in when I decided to give the project one last chance at life by attending the Banff Television Festival - and what a great decision that was! Not only did I have an absolute hoot making new friends and contacts, but I got interest from Channel 4 and Time/Warner for my documentary, and from Paragon for the feature I also took along for the ride. In the process I learned some very valuable lessons about making Banff work, especially for a neophyte such as myself who not only had to make do on very little money, but who also had no previous track record at Banff from which to secure meetings in advance. So, here's my advice for winging it at the Festival.

Go the whole week if you can afford it; if not, the first three days appear to be the most important. By late Wednesday the crowd starts to thin out so unless there is someone arriving later whom you absolutely must meet, aim for earlier in the week. The Festival lists their schedule as well as a list of delegates at their internet site ([www.banfftvfest.com](http://www.banfftvfest.com)) so you can determine in advance which seminars are important to you for information, which are important because a panel member is on your hit list, and which you can schmooze through.

Make the most of what little time you have - this is no time to be shy. I found the first day a little intimidating so I only left materials in people's mailboxes, hoping they would call, but truth is they rarely do unless they're expecting you. You have to approach them personally, make them want to read what you left in their mailbox, and encourage a meeting during the festival or later. I also found that some delegates are so busy that even if they find your one-sheet interesting, they're just too bogged down to make a further request. I scored with Channel 4 only after accosting Peter Grimsdale twice (!) and convincing him he wanted more than just a promo piece. He left with the outline and I left with a request for some narration footage and a copy of the treatment.

Limit your materials to one-sheets and short outlines. Leave the lengthy treatments and scripts behind. I found that no one wanted to lug a script home; those interested asked for it to be mailed to them. Also, delegates get a mound of information, so it's best just to make the contact,

give them something to remember you by, then send more info later. As Vivian Schiller from Time/Warner said to me: "If you give me the outline now, it'll get lost in the pile. But if you mail it to me I'll be sure to read it. Here's my card."

Further to publicity material, I made up postcards on my computer of my one-sheets reduced down to four to a sheet, with a graphic on one side and contact info on the bottom. They were small enough to fit into my evening purse,



Demers' 4.25x5.5" postcard for her feature, *The Messiah*, made with MS Publisher and printed on a 300 dpi laser printer - small, smart & classy.



so even during the social events I had something I could give to anyone who expressed interest. These cards proved to be really popular - people found them "smart" and "classy" - and I encourage you all to steal the idea for next

year. They're cheap, too, if you have a decent printer and know a little about desk-top publishing (or have a friend that does).

Lastly, if you have little or no money, a few pointers on keeping down costs: share a room, preferably in a B&B, with a friend(s). Then get to know your neighbours, because chances are they're at the Festival too and you can share taxis if you're not within walking distance. If you can afford to stay in Banff for a few days but can't afford to attend the Festival each day, then register for at least one day and just hang around the hotel the rest of the time; you may get lucky and bump into the right person or, on your registered day, you may get a targeted delegate to agree to meet you the next day in the deli or on the steps out front. Also, many delegates get whole week passes but only attend for a few days, so you can often score their unneeded social events tickets if you're shameless enough to admit your poverty - I was and scored tickets to the museum opening and the international dinner. (And for the really outrageous, try this while socializing at the clubs: "Heh darling, whose expense account are you on?" "The Learning Channel's; why, what do you need?" "Tonic with a slice of lime.")

If all that fails, try this clever stunt executed flawlessly by the makers of *The Electric Playground*: wishing to promote a new series centered around a barber chair, they trucked up said chair, planted it in the middle of the conference driveway, and waited for curious passers-by. They got press coverage, broadcaster interest, and sunburn. What a great idea!

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