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The Business of TV Production

The Business of TV Production provides an insider's view of television production from initial concept to developing, creating and airing the final program. It outlines the main functions of each of the players involved and the key stages of the production process.

Covering all genres of television – drama and comedy, documentary and current affairs, infotainment and reality TV – it deals with the business side of production and provides context for all aspects of the operation and the challenges of each genre, such as funding, sourcing a creative team, and marketing and distribution.

This book is for all students taking courses in television production and for those in the industry wanting to upgrade their skills.

Craig Collie is a freelance producer and consultant. He has been working in the television industry since 1969, both in production and network management. He has designed the television production curriculums at Queensland University of Technology, and been executive in charge of student production at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS).

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Preface

The business of television production is all about creative management and the management of creativity. At its heart lie the conventional canons of good management – financial control, people management, inputs, legal oversight and so on – but overlying this is a need for considerable flexibility. No matter how much market research is done, no-one has any real idea whether a television program will work or not. And production costs are equally unreliable, subject to weather disruption, sulking actors and members of the public who have lost interest in being on camera. It is possibly the only manufacturing industry that conventionally puts a contingency into its production budget.

On the other side of the television coin is the management of the creative process. Sometimes the people are brilliantly and erratically creative, sometimes they are the only people in the world with any regard for their ability. They can be dishonest, backstabbing egomaniacs. Or they can be cool, calm and collected professionals who know exactly how to carry out their craft in a way that adds immeasurably to the quality of the program. They can be the source of lifelong friendships.

The television industry is an industry of paradoxes. Television programs are made, for the most part, for networks that are extraordinarily risk averse, when their own interest is best served by taking risk, and whose commissioning executives often seem to make decisions based on anything but the quality of the program proposal.

So why do people expose themselves to this degree of uncertainty and randomness? Why have I done so for over thirty-five years? Because it is perversely rewarding and because the challenge of steering a production through all the pitfalls that lie in waiting calls on all your accumulated wisdom and experience. You learn how to anticipate many of the traps and to negotiate your way around them. You take a pride in your professionalism.

This book is designed to give the reader an insight into the process of converting a curious idea into an immensely satisfying and, hopefully, successful television program. It is written from the point of view of the producer, the poor fool charged with steering the ship of production through to its destination, and it is an insider's view. The story of the business of television production is the story of the producer. It's as simple as that.

Most tertiary courses in media, communications, film and television – call them what you will – focus on teaching the creative crafts of production: camerawork, editing and, everyone’s aim in the business it seems, directing. I’m not convinced that these areas can be taught to any great extent beyond basic operational skills, and these are often glossed over in favour of more time spent on aesthetics and analysis. With increasing demand for these courses to have greater connection to industry, there is a growing interest in the business side of television production. At the least, this side lends itself to the processes of teaching, although even then it has its limits. There are basic operations and basic knowledge to learn, but ultimately even the business side of television is about judgement and instinct. That cannot be taught. It is partly already there (or not, as the case may be) and partly accumulated through experience. This book is, first and foremost, a textbook at the tertiary education level, but I hope it would serve a useful purpose as well as a primer for those already in the industry who want to upgrade their skills to try their hand at producing.

There are three main aspects to the book, covering the three sets of skills required in the business of production. First, it is about people management and, through the leadership of the production team, maintaining an editorial and creative focus in all the contributing craft skills that are woven into a finished television program. These skills are common to any television production anywhere in the world, the universal qualities required of a television producer. The second aspect is how to determine and obtain the necessary resources to ensure the best possible program will be made for the funds available to it. The most crucial resource is, of course, money. This knowledge is specific to the country in which the program is being made. An Australian production needs to know what resources are available and how they are used in Australia, how the conventions of production work in Australia, and what the industry structure and culture is that prevails in Australia. The third aspect is knowing the steps along the production path from concept to delivery, what the role of each step is, and how it might be modified for the specific needs of each production. A triumvirate of people, resources and process.

This book is not a checklist of the things to do to take a production down some standard pathway. That would be a misrepresentation of the way the profession of production operates. There is no prescription for making a television program. Every program is different. Every production within a particular genre is different from the other productions in that genre, but not as different as from the productions in other genres. There are conventions that are generally useful to follow or adapt as long as they serve the particular needs of the program. Where they don’t, the production process should be amended so it does suit those needs. Each production pathway is planned with a mix of experience and judgement. The guiding principle is: know what is generally done, then do what will work best for the program.

If there’s no one way to make a television program, it’s important that a book such as this doesn’t reflect the experience of just one producer. This is not about my approach to television production, although elements of that are inevitably part of it. I have endeavoured to bring together a consensus of experiences of various participants in the industry with a wide range of approaches. I have tried to weave this aggregated experience through the common narrative of production.

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I'd like to particularly note and to thank Sue Murray (Fandango Australia) and Ian Collie (Essential Viewing), who read and gave critical feedback on selected chapters, Peter Herbert (AFTRS) and John Eastway (Eastway Communication), with whom I had several discussions about what being a producer is all about, and for the insights into their particular areas of experience and expertise (in no particular order): Peter Abbott (Freehand Group), Paddy Conroy and Bob Donoghue (Ovation), Fiona Gilroy and Erika Honey (SBS Marketing), Peter George (producer), Paul Vincent (SBS), Tina Braham and Chris Spry (The Lab), David Vadi-veloo (producer), David Goldie (Goldie Media), Ben Cunningham (Austar), Fiona Crago (Beyond Distribution), John Russell (Essential Viewing), and no doubt others I have accidentally overlooked. There are a number of publications whose views I have incorporated into the body of the book. They are listed at the end of chapters. There are also the people I have worked with over the last thirty-five years who have contributed to my growing understanding of the production process and, of course, my family and my wife, Jan, whose support and encouragement have made the task that much easier. Lastly, my thanks to Alan McKee of Queensland University of Technology for suggesting me to Cambridge University Press to write this book, to Cambridge University Press and Jill Henry for their faith, hopefully not misplaced, that I could, and to the editor, Carolyn Pike, for ironing out the bumps and making the book better than it was when I first wrote it.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used either in this book or in the television industry generally.

ABA	Australian Broadcasting Authority
ABC	American Broadcasting Company; Australian Broadcasting Commission/Corporation
ABN	Australian Business Number
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
ACMA	Australian Communications and Media Authority
ACN	Australian Company Number
AD	assistant director
ADR	automatic dialogue replacement
A&E	Arts and Entertainment
AFC	Australian Film Commission
AFL	Australian Football League
AFTRS	Australian Film Television and Radio School
AIDC	Australian International Documentary Conference
AMCOS	Australasian Mechanical Copyright Owners' Society Ltd
AP	associate producer
APRA	Australasian Performing Rights Association Ltd
APS	Australian Public Service
ARC	aspect ratio converter
ASDA	Australian Screen Directors Association
ASDACS	Australian Screen Directors Authorship Collecting Society
ASIC	Australian Securities and Investments Commission
ASTRA	Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association
ATA	Admission Temporaire/Temporary Admission
ATF	Asia Television Forum
ATMOSS	Australian Trade Marks Online Search System
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
ATPA	Actors Television Programs Agreement
ATTRRA	Australian Television Repeats and Residuals Agreement

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ATSC	Advanced Television Standards Committee
AT&T	American Telephone and Telegraph Company
AustLII	Australasian Legal Information Institute
AV	adult violence (classification)
AWA	Amalgamated Wireless Australasia
AWG	Australian Writers' Guild
AWGACS	Australian Writers' Guild Authorship Collecting Society Ltd
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BITC	burnt-in timecode
BNF	basic negotiated fee
BRACS	Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme
BSB	British Satellite Broadcasting
C	children (classification)
©	copyright
CAL	Copyright Agency Ltd
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CD-R	compact disk – recordable
CGI	computer-generated imagery
CNN	Cable News Network
CNNN	The Chaser Non-stop News Network
COFDM	Coded Orthogonal Frequency Division Multiplex
CPB	Corporation for Public Broadcasting
CSI	Crime Scene Investigation
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
Cth	Commonwealth (of Australia)
CTVA	Commercial Television Australia
CU	close-up
D	day
DA	director's assistant
DAT	digital audio tape
DCable	digital cable
DCITA	Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
DIY	do-it-yourself
DOP	director of photography
dpi	dots per inch
DSat	digital satellite
DTH	direct-to-home
DTT	digital terrestrial television
DV	digital videotape
DVB	digital video broadcasting
DVB-H	digital video broadcasting – hand-held
DVB-T	digital video broadcasting – terrestrial
DV camera	digital video camera
DVD	digital versatile disk
DVE	digital vision effects
DVR	digital video recorder
EDL	edit decision list

EFT	electronic funds transfer
EMI	Electrical and Musical Industries
E&O	errors and omissions (insurance)
EP	executive producer
EPG	Electronic Program Guide
ESPN	Entertainment and Sports Programming Network
Ext.	exterior
FACTS	Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations
FBT	fringe benefits tax
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
FCP	Final Cut Pro
FFC	Film Finance Corporation Australia Ltd
FLIC	Film-Licensed Investment Company
FPI	film producers' indemnity
FTA	free-to-air
FTO	Film and Television Office (NSW)
FX	effects
G	general (classification)
GDI	General Development Investment
GE	General Electric
GST	goods and services tax
HA	high angle
HBO	Home Box Office
HCA	High Court of Australia
HDTV	high-definition television
HOD	head of department
HUT	households using television
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority
IDFA	Amsterdam International Documentary Film Festival
IFB	interruptible foldback (or feedback)
Int.	interior
ITA	Independent Television Authority
ITV	Independent Television
iTV	interactive television
JPEG	Joint Photographic Experts Group
KKR	Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co.
LA	low angle
LoI	letter of interest
L-VIS	Live Video Insertion System
M	mature (classification)
MA	mature audience (classification)
MD	mini-disk
M&E	music and effects (sound track)
MEAA	Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance
MGM	Metro Goldwyn Meyer
MHz	megahertz
MMDS	Multichannel Multipoint Distribution Service
MOU	memorandum of understanding

xx *Abbreviations*

MPEG	Motion Picture Experts Group
MPPA	Motion Picture Production Award
MS	mid-shot
MTV	Music Television
MYOB	Mind Your Own Business
N	night
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
NGO	non-government organisation
NHK	Nippon Hoso Kyokai (Japan Broadcasting Corporation)
NITV	National Indigenous Television Ltd
NTFO	Northern Territory Film Office
NTSC	National Television Systems Committee
NVOD	near video on demand
OB	outside broadcast
OCG	Office of the Children's Guardian (NSW)
OFLC	Office of Film and Literature Classification
OH&S	occupational health and safety
OMF	open media framework
ORS	Office of State Revenue (NSW)
OzTAM	Australian Television Audience Measurement
P	preschool children (classification)
PA	producer's assistant; public address
PAL	phase alternating line
PAN R	pan right
PAYG	pay as you go
PBL	Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
PC	personal computer
PDF	portable document format
PFTC	Pacific Film and Television Commission
PG	parental guidance recommended
PIA	Production and Investment Agreement
PILA	Production Investment and Licence Agreement
PLA	Production and Licence Agreement
PMG	Postmaster-General
POC	proof of concept
POV	point of view
PPCA	Phonographic Performance Company of Australia
PPV	pay per view
PUT	people using television
PVI	Princeton Video Images
PVR	personal video recorder
RCA	Radio Corporation of America
R&D	research and development
ROW	rest of the world (sales)
SAFC	South Australian Film Corporation
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SDTV	standard-definition digital television

SECAM	Sequential Couleur à Memoire (Sequential Colour with Memory)
SFX	special effects
SingTel	Singapore Telecommunications
SMS	short messaging service
SOT	sound off tape
SPAA	Screen Producers' Association of Australia
STS	Simplified Tax System
TA	travel allowance
TARP	target audience rating point
TBS	Turner Broadcasting Service
Telco	telecommunications company
TEN	The Entertainment Network
TFN	Tax File Number
TIFF	Tagged Image File Format
TP	technical producer
Tx	transmission
UHF	ultra-high frequency
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney
VCR	video cassette recorder
VEA	Video Education Australasia Pty Ltd
VFX	visual effects
VHF	very high frequency
VI\$COPY	Visual Arts Copyright Collecting Society
V/O	voice-over (picture)
VoIP	Voice over Internet Protocol
VOD	video on demand
VR	virtual reality
VSB	Vestigial Sideband Broadcasting
V/T	videotape
WS	wide shot
Z/I	zoom in
Z/O	zoom out
2D	two-dimensional
2S	two-shot
3D	three-dimensional