

See what I did there?

This week we have a guest jumping in. I met Dianna doing one of the Virtual Pitchfests that Fade In magazine does. We've chatted back and forth for almost a year now and she sent this to me last week. She wrote this after attending her first pitchfest and thought it might give you guys (along with me) a little insight on what it's like pitching at these events.

So without further ado...

The first pitch fest I attended was fantastic. My writing partner and I, though relatively new to the game, had three scripts under our belts. We had practiced our pitches, knew every detail, catalyst, mid-point and climactic ending for our scripts by heart. We'd read every scrap of information we could get about how to pitch and tried to find out everything about the companies we wanted to pitch to. Whew. We were set.

So far so good. They prepared themselves and were good to go. That's more than I can say for most people.

Thing is, when we got there, even though we went down before the roosters are even awake, we weren't first in line.

Yeah, they start lining up early. They're there WAY before any of us arrive. Nine times out of ten we don't even really want to go to the free breakfast because we're not awake enough to chat with anyone.

Early morning pitches are NOT a good idea. Let us wake up a bit. Let us get ONE cup of shitty hotel coffee in us first.

Uh-oh. Since we were a writing team and paid for two registrations, we could sign up for double the pitches – about 30 in two days.

That's not that many.

Woo Hoo! Well, small woo hoo. Turns out many of the companies we had so carefully researched and selected for our pitch were full by the time we got to sign up, so we had to wing it on almost half our pitches.

Why do you have to wing it? If you know your pitch, why does it matter who you're pitching to?

Oh well, we can do it. I mean, it's not like we were bedraggled already, having to line up at four am to get ready after flying across the country the day before! Oops, that really did happen. Oh well. It took so long to sign up that we had to decide between eating

breakfast and going to the esteemed “How to Pitch” session. We chose breakfast, since it was going to be a long day.

Good choice. I’ve never attended one of these “classes” on how you should pitch, but I can tell from being on the other side of the table...they’re not working people!

SO, either they are giving you bullshit advice OR you guys are fucking up the translation and misconstruing what they are “teaching” you.

Keep in mind...those who can’t do...teach.

Our first pitch loomed: What would we say? Butterflies. Hand sweats. No - we knew, we’d practiced. We paced the lobby for five minutes until they herded us like cattle into the room.

MOOOOOOOO!!

We sat down with a very pleasant woman and confessed it was our first pitch – ever!

Bad idea.

She confessed back – she was new at this too!

Worse idea.

Kismet!

Like I keep telling you guys...there’s no reason to EVER be nervous. As Dianna found out, the people on the other side of the table are sometimes dumber than you!

We pitched our script and she asked for a one-sheet.

Either A) she was THAT new and didn’t know what to ask for (my first pitchfest I took ANYTHING anyone wanted to put in my hand. Now? I won’t even take a business card.) or B) she knew more than she let on and was trying to get you guys to leave the table.

Oops. The pitch gods said not to bring anything.

I get this a lot. Who are these people that tell you not to do things and why do you listen to them?

Did I mention we were newbies? They said no business cards, copies of the script, nothing. We had no one sheets. Oh well, she said, better luck next time. Crap-ola.

I agree with the copies of the script thing...it's all digital now. I want to read on my iPad, not carry around a stack of scripts. Hell, I don't even ask for the script anymore. If I'm interested I'll ask for the first 15 pages. I can tell in 3-5 if I want to keep reading.

The next pitch, ok. Asked for a one-sheet again. Promised to email it (yeah, we wise up pretty quickly.) The one later that morning was the hum-dinger I'll never forget as long as I live. We sat down, pretty confident, as we hadn't been shot down - so far. As we started to pitch, I noticed the woman losing interest. For some reason, I started talking faster, as if this would win her over. Because that so often works in real life. Before I go on, let me assure you that I am a completely normal person. Normally.
UH-OH! BAIL! BAIL!

Then she started making this "face." I can only describe it as a face you'd make if you see a dead bug in your soup.

AND HERE COMES THE FLAMES...

This was the point at which my brain broke with reality. I started saying things like, "And then really exciting stuff happens! You know! They get in a car accident! Stuff! It's totally fun!"

MAY DAY! MAY DAY!

Yeah. Totally. Then, as she shook her head in slow motion, I swear I blurted out, "There's a watermelon seed-spitting contest!"

KA BOOOOOOOOM!!!!

CRASH AND BURN.

She looked at me for a moment and then said one word. "No." My brain warped back to normal at that point and we graciously thanked her for her time. As we were walking out of the ballroom, I thought, "Maybe the stress and pressure got to me. That was my one." The story's a big hit at parties.

Riiiiight. Pressure.

After another six hours of pitching, we were punch drunk on adrenaline. We walked up to one of our execs wearing a hat with a "B" on it. I gave him a shout-out, "Boston!" and

he grinned like we were rubbing elbows in front of the keg at a frat party. Yeah, it was going well.

This is EXACTLY what happens on both sides of the table. At a certain point you just don't give a fuck any more. You guys loosen up. We loosen up. We're all pretty much just delirious.

We got asked for scripts or one sheets by about 66.3% of the people we pitched to (not that we broke it down mathematically or anything.) That night I was so tired when I got back to the hotel room I actually fell on my ass reaching into that mini-fridge for an \$8.00 Diet Coke.

Riiiiight. Tired.

Later we went for a walk and I took a picture of Daffy Duck's star on the walk of fame. Daffy rocks. Anyhoo, things were going great.

It's the little things...

FYI, when you live about a block away from Daffy's star, you really could care less and more importantly, you grow to loathe the people who stop and take pictures with said star because they're just blocking your way and preventing you from getting home to your couch and TV that much quicker.

Not that I speak from experience or anything.

The next day of the pitch fest, we woke up on eastern time, which is about 4 am CA time. Yikes. Couldn't sleep. It was one lo-ong morning watching the hotel security camera on channel 3 until the pitchfest started. The first few pitches didn't go so well. I panicked. Did we lose our mojo? Or is it that with Saturday pitches the execs know they still have Saturday night, but Sunday pitches are just followed by a week of dismal, old work?

Nope. It's called a wrap party. Then the after party. Then dinner. Then the after after party. We're going to sleep around the time you woke up watching the security channel.

Grumps. Ok, so maybe I was a teensy bit grumpy, too, having gotten up at 4 am two days in a row. But things improved - the later pitches went well and all was better in mojo land.

Did I mention the other people pitching? People watching at the pitchfest was so interesting!

HA! Now we get to the good stuff. Just note, this is not coming from me people. This is a 3rd party looking from the inside.

One gentleman walked through the lobby hollering, "Has anyone seen my chair?" apparently, to determine if anyone had seen his chair (yes, he brought a folding chair for himself and then somehow misplaced it).

This is a regular occurrence. Guaranteed he's a regular at these events.

Number of event gone to: 68

Number of scripts written: 30

Number of scripts sold: 0

A woman walking around with pink boxing gloves around her neck.

Shameless promotion for, what I'm sure is, a wonderful script.

A man hawking his book, self-published, I presume, that later told us he could "buy" everyone in the room.

This is a regular occurrence as well. Don't you just want to say, "then why are you here?"

I saw people coming from pitches on the verge of tears and some that looked positively giddy. Many seemed shell-shocked.

Totally ridiculous. But true.

There were also a few "seasoned writers" - grumpy bald guys I could spot a mile away that have had one thing produced or optioned and spent years chasing a follow up.

See guy with chair above.

Ah, Hollywood. What's your dream?

One guy I pitched to had on my state's team jersey – can you say connection three times fast?! Ca-ching! I was excited to pitch to him! I was rolling along when I could see that he was checking his email or facebook or maybe he was perusing porn, I have no idea, except I know he wasn't listening.

Porn.

or live tweeting.

Nope. Porn.

I kept on like a trooper, but every time I tried to make eye contact, he was reading something on the screen. I started to falter, stumble over my words. Eek.

As one who is constantly looking at por...I mean live tweeting on my phone...here's a little advice. Make a choice...either push through and mentally say "fuck this guy."

or...

Stop and wait. And when he looks up at you say "no, it's okay. I'll wait."

Either way this pitch is ultimately going to be worthless, so it doesn't really matter. The first choice will allow you to get some practice in, the latter will give you the satisfaction of pointing out he's a douchebag.

Obviously don't do this to me.

Tried to steady myself. Faltered. Damn. Oh shit, he noticed. Then he did something crazy. He must have realized he was being rude and he looked back at me! Whoa. I kept it up and made it to the end. He asked for the script. Score! Never heard back, but hey! He asked for it!

See, like I said. It's going to be pointless either way. Whatever you do, don't let it knock you off your game.

Dear Wondrous People We Pitch To,

I know it runs the gamut from mildly annoys to infuriates you when people "waste" your time with material not suitable for your company. The thing is, sometimes we don't have a choice -- the pitch organizers throw us into the lion's ring with cheers of "Take the meeting! You never know! This is who is available even though you have a mainstream big budget thriller and they only do micro-budget indies about french-speaking dolphins! It's open! This is the schedule that you paid for but didn't want! Go!" and we stagger across the room to the open seat (or sit ramrod straight for the computer screen, whichever it may be). Please take this into consideration while you gnash your teeth. We feel your pain.

Sincerely,

Your Ever-Loving and Grateful Pitchee

Dear Ever-Loving and Grateful Pitchee's,

Write better shit.

**Sincerely,
Wondrous People Who Get Pitched To**

I kid. I kid. Save the angry emails. You're right. A lot of times we get people pitching to us who were "sent" to us rather than writers who really want to pitch to us.

BUT, I promise you, it's only a few a day. I really wish all of you could sit in my shoes for just 1 hour of pitching.

I fully realize that pitch organizers have a Herculean task – please both execs and attendees.

FYI, most of the time, they really don't give a shit about us. YOU'RE the ones paying to be there. Not us.

You know, just the small task of setting up the venue to sell the next three hundred billion dollar blockbuster script or that Oscar-winning indie mixed in among the 96.379% of scripts that will never (and should never) make it to the big screen (darn math again!) is a feat in itself. It's a dance and even though everybody tries, sometimes toes gets stepped on. Gotta roll with it, move on. I mean, Juno, really? Who knew?

We've pitched online since then, it was great fun when we pitched to a giant question mark onscreen because Skype wasn't working.

It's just as much fun hearing a pitch from a question mark.

I bet he was paying attention and not surfing porn.

I WAS TWEETING!! TWEETING, I TELL YOU!

But what can I say? It's all part of the game and it's all good. You win some, you lose some, but you always learn (even if you learn never ever blurt out "watermelon seed spitting contests!") I read somewhere that trying to sell a script in Hollywood is like trying to push an elephant through a pinhole. No biggie - just added "Elephant Pusher" to my resume and kept going. What can I say? Pitching is fun, crazy, tiring, scary, and dreadful all rolled into a schizophrenic ball. Can't wait until the next time!

Thanks Dianna for sending this in. Hope you guys got a little something from this. There's actually a part two to this little saga, but we'll save that for next time...

Till next week...