



## **MEDIA PROFILE: That's Hollywood for you: it's gotta sell for ET to give coverage**

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Television viewers simply can't get enough celebrity news. It's also one of the most competitive markets when it comes to getting coverage.

Craig McGuire dishes the ins and outs of getting on Entertainment Tonight.

We can't help ourselves. We're simply obsessed with celebrity. From Tom cruising Penelope, to what Robert Downey Jr. wore to his latest hearing, Entertainment Tonight (ET), produced by Paramount Domestic Television in association with Cox Broadcasting, has tapped into that addiction, providing millions of viewers with their daily A-list fix for the past 20 years.

From a publicist's viewpoint, ET represents the pinnacle of mainstream media penetration. After all, it claims more than two million nightly viewers spread across more than 70 countries. But to get to the mountaintop, you're going to have to sign up some A-list talent. Just make sure, unlike the Kim Cattrall-Nikon saga, that your celebrity has more to say than just plug your product.

"You need to pitch ET that they can catch up with the celebrity on the set of their new movie or music video," says Lisa Giassa, senior publicity manager of Prentice Hall Press, and a former regular ET pitcher while at Porter Novelli.

"You have to train the celebrity to plug the product, much the way (Porter Novelli) did with Polaroid and Britney Spears," she explains. "During the interview, Britney was snapping photos of the ET cameramen and interviewer with her Polaroid for her journal."

Sometimes, it seems so right, like when Billy Joel headlined for Piano Grand, a PBS special presentation with the Smithsonian in celebration of the piano's 300th anniversary.

"The hook for Joel was that he was going to debut his first classical music piece on the show," says Lisa Shenkle from Verb! Communications.

"The original Piano Man gives his piano a new sound! Looking for something unique, new, or unavailable anywhere else is the key."

Building relationships becomes crucial when you're trying to catch the attention of a show like ET. Though not in entertainment communications per se, as a VP at Venice, CA-based PR agency The Blaze Company, Steve Valentine realizes the importance of keeping in touch with ET producer Bonnie Tiegel, who he's known for years.

"I make sure to call and offer tips when I have them," he says. "By offering something they can use, especially when I don't have anything to pitch, I'm establishing the right kind of relationship. When I do go in with a pitch, I can trade on that relationship."

ET producers are always on deadline, so don't kill too many trees developing pitch material. "Never send along a long-winded press release," says Giassa.

"They just won't read it. I would send two paragraphs offering the who, the what, and the where, with the who obviously the most important piece of information."

Keep in mind that ET producers seek out one-on-ones with celebrities.

Make sure they have access as celebs hit the red carpet, or they'll kill the segment. "I pitched Lauryn Hill for a partnership she was doing with Alta Vista, and ET was into covering Lauryn's free concert at Irving Plaza, but only if they could interview her," says Giassa. "One-on-one interviews were not part of Lauryn's agreement, so she didn't agree to an interview, and ET never came to our event."

Also bear in mind the need to bring something unique. Though it was the first of its kind when the show debuted in 1981, ET now faces off nightly with a cadre of competitors, including Access Hollywood and Extra. While they vary in focus, these other shows are celebrity-driven, prompting strong, and at times heated behind-the-scenes competition.

"They demand that exclusivity, getting more than what Extra and Access Hollywood has," explains Giassa. "So don't think you can get your product or celebrity spokesperson on all these shows the same night, that is, unless you're able to hire Julia Roberts or Tom Cruise."

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Locations: Entertainment Tonight is taped in Hollywood, CA. Bureaus are located in New York, Chicago, Washington DC, London, and Tokyo.

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