



MEDIA PROFILE - Finding the latest trend for 'Good Morning America'. Every publicist wants their client/product on 'Good Morning America.' But as Craig McGuire reports, your best bet is to present a hot pop culture trend and be persistent

Published on May 07 2001

Producers at ABC's Good Morning America (GMA) have been busy for weeks preparing a number of segments to coincide with the upcoming execution of Oklahoma City Bomber Timothy McVeigh. Newsworthy, timely and of interest to a broad audience, the story has all the attributes GMA producers crave.

Meanwhile, GMA nailed its highest ratings of the year in April for an interview with President Bush. Producers were further delighted when segments of the interview, in which the president commented on relations with China, made their way into scores of media outlets around the world.

Most clients don't possess McVeigh's infamy or the sheer star power of the President of the US. But there are still ways to grab a spot on the show.

'New, new, new, it's just got to be new,' says GMA executive producer Shelley Ross. 'We're looking for the latest buzz, hot pop culture trends, medical breakthroughs, new consumer items - and we love great visuals and great wit.'

From the tragedy at Littleton, CO, to 'Losing Weight With Good Morning America,' GMA leads with a hard news intro, later tempered with more light-hearted lifestyle and human interest-style features.

Approaching its 27th year, GMA received a much-needed makeover in early 1999 to bolster ratings, outfitting the show with a new set, new song, and Charles Gibson and Diane Sawyer as the new co-anchors. Airing weekdays from 7am to 9am, they've got plenty of airtime to stock.

'We coordinate a tsunami wave of information,' says Ross. 'But, we don't want to miss one new hot thing.'

Important for many publicists, product placements aren't exactly a high priority for GMA producers, though they are not out of the question either.

'It can't be a straight plug, there has to be news value there,'

explains Ross. 'It must be a new product, something they've never seen before.'

And, it must be something that will help you, change your life or make some aspect of life more efficient.'

With its immense audience, GMA's senior team of eight professionals has to digest a torrent of pitches - the majority of which cross the desk of Sue Carswell, story editor. Story meetings are held at least once a week.

Plan carefully before you pick up the phone. Ross, though open to most techniques, is steadfastly against pitching via voice-mail. 'As much as I would love to, I can't respond to them,' she says.

Patience is a virtue, especially when you're pitching a high-profile show like GMA. 'Persistence will pay off if you've got a great story,' says Ross.

GMA producers sometimes find themselves at the mercy of larger news cycles, like the upcoming McVeigh execution, or just inundated with multiple flavors of the same story type.

'I'll look at the story grid and see there are several hot movies released at the same time,' says Ross. 'Then it starts to not feel like our show.'

Where's our hard news? Where's our medical? Unfortunately, sometimes we have to turn something down for scheduling.'

Patience and a product or client with broad appeal will give you the best shot of garnering a spot on GMA. While the show doesn't specifically target any particular demographic consistently, Ross says they develop features and touch all demographics at least once a year.

Russell Watson was one such guest that hit on multiple cylinders. Last month, the young opera singer with Universal Classic Records from Manchester, England visited the show prior to making his American debut.

'Two years ago he was working in a factory and singing in karaoke bars,' says Ross. 'These days his CD went triple platinum in London, and he's battling Madonna on the charts.'

The morning of the show, the record company took out a full-page ad in USA Today trumpeting the appearance. 'We absolutely love to get 'As seen on GMA' plugs,' says Ross.

'We're in morning hand-to-hand combat,' Ross says. 'That's why we need to appeal to our audience and stay ahead of the trends.' Having gained ground against NBC News' Today in the ratings, GMA leads CBS News' Early Show.

Therefore, GMA needs great pitches just as much as the publicists need placements. Says Ross: 'It's a wonderful tango we dance together.'

CONTACT LIST

Good Morning America

Address: ABC News 'Good Morning America,' 147 Columbus Ave., NY, NY 10023

Tel: (212) 456-5900

Executive Producer: Shelley Ross

Story editor: Sue Carswell.