

The Publicity Club of New York presents
"Beyond The Headlines - News Programs That Make You Think"

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THE NEWSHOUR WITH JIM LEHRER

Rob Flynn, Director of Communications

Since I'm batting cleanup I'll try to be fairly brief so that we can get on to the questions. The NewsHour is very different in terms of being a pitchable commodity. We have been on the air for 30 years, we started in 1975 as a half an hour with Jim Lehrer and Robert MacNeil and their real goal at that point was to have a half an hour and devote it to one topic. So whether it was a robustly compelling topic that evening if that happened to be your thing or not it was really in the eyes of the beholder. But if there is a mission at The NewsHour it is to address serious news and address it in depth and by serious we don't mean it has to be deadly boring, but we are willing to take the risk to be boring if that is what something demands but we really do welcome pitches but I was saying to Carrie earlier, we look at pitches as more of an investment pitch at the NewsHour because we don't do short breezy pieces, we don't do celebrity news, but we do have a wide variety of stories. We're set up like a newspaper in terms of having a gate system. We've got international and foreign affairs, national affairs, politics, law, education, we've got dedicated units to cover science, we have a very robust science unit, health unit, a media unit and we also do a lot of books and arts coverage. So there's a wide range of the things that we do cover, but within that probably the key thing I would communicate from our producers is that we need to know where people are when news breaks, so rather than being pitched on the world's biggest or smallest pancake for a story to be covered tomorrow even if it is a delicious and compelling pancake, we might need to know instead in three months when the pancake factory crashes and kills 12,000 people in a community, where is the pancake expert? So, for example, when the New York City blackout occurred two summer ago, it happened, as you guys know better than I, it happened late in the afternoon and once things started to cascade from New York down the east coast, our reporter had to be able to find people right away. Fortunately they have these rolodexes that are as thick as this room so within a half an hour they were able to have three guests, a couple in the studio and a couple via hookup, on the program. So the real key is if you've got a compelling story or you're with a financial services house or a think tank or whatever and you've got key individuals who you think are compelling, interesting experts on specific topics then you should get in touch with our reporters, they're very easy to contact, and make sure they know who those people are. We are constantly looking for new voices on the program, it is a real aim of Jim Lehrer to get diverse voices on the program whether it's by expertise or by gender or by ethnicity, we try not to be limited to being a show of white men inside the beltway. We really want to get voices from around the country and around the world on the program.

So again, I could go on and on, but in a nutshell that is really who and what the NewsHour is, we are really looking to cover all of the interesting topics that are around, but again since we go into such depth and we only have an hour each night we are limited. For example, tonight we have Vice President Cheney on as an interview, but that'll be a half an hour interview with Jim, then we're covering the King funeral in depth. We assume that a lot of our viewers don't have time to watch cable all day, so we'll do big chunks of the King funeral and then I think we're covering GM. So just because of the structure of the program that's a whole show made up of three, maybe four topic areas so it doesn't lend itself to a lot of other stuff.

The NewsHour used to be split between Washington and New York and in 1975 everything was consolidated. Everything is in Washington except for our science unit and national production which is located in Denver. We're in Arlington, VA.

Again, I'll be glad to take some questions. Thank you.