

PCNY Luncheon  
Cable News on the Rise  
July 23, 2003

**Mike Tanaka, News Senior Producer MSNBC** – The astrological sign is Cancer, just in case anyone was wondering. I can speak about MSNBC in general, but I'm mostly going to limit my comments or at least my explanation to daytime programming, which actually, under my supervision begins as soon as the Imus show goes off the air and ends when the opinion programs, "Buchanan and Press" and "Hardball", come on later. Although a lot of the comments that I'm going to make or suggestions are going to be applicable to those shows as well. Basically what we produce, we're a 24-hour news outlet, so really when you're looking at who you want to pitch and the kinds of people you want to present to us, we're really reacting to what's happening in the news. I'll give you an example: today we're really covering very heavily the story of Saddam's sons and what that means is we're looking for analysis. We have people on the ground, we have reporters there who are covering the story, but we're also looking for analysis, we're looking for other ways to cover the story, other angles. So what are the things we're looking for? We're looking for people who are Saddam biographers, we're looking for people who have insight into Saddam's sons, people who could tell stories, could be anecdotal, talk about any sort of stories about Saddam Hussein, their sons, the family. Con Coughlin, the author of SADDAM, KING OF TERROR is a good example. We're also looking for people who once played on the Iraqi Olympic team because they'll have stories to tell about Oday's reign of terror. So we're not always looking for the dry consul on foreign relations people, although we have those on as well.

Another example would be, we don't really do lifestyle segments anymore. MSNBC did at one time, we had a number of shows that covered parenting and those kinds of issues, but we don't really do that, we don't do cooking demos. So we're really looking for newsmakers and stories that jump off the news page. But I can give you an example of where you can look at a story in the news and then look at your client and see where that can cross over: the Kobe Bryant story, for example. I was pitched recently a couple of authors, these are ex-wives and wives or former wives of NBA players who talk about what it's like to have your husband be out on the road and be in that high-profile situation, to be constantly tempted. That's an interesting story, that's a lifestyle story, that's a Redbook chapter that we wouldn't have looked at a couple of months ago but that's the story we're chasing right now. So really, one of the best ways to approach how you think of stories or your clients that would work well for us is to carefully follow the news, watch the flow of news stories and then think about the kinds of people you have that would add to the story, give depth to it, analysis, any way that those stories cross over. And then, of course, any first person accounts, anybody that is involved in a news story, we're clearly interested in. That's the nutshell of what we do during the day, we're really looking for news, news analysis in a way that expand upon those stories. Often, it's being creative in coming up with ways to make your people fit that news story.

One of the things I think is key when you pitch to television producers is to really be very aware of their show, how their show operates, what they're looking for. All it takes is to watch a little of it, tape it, watch it, get a sense of the flow, look at some of the people who are on there, write them down. There are guests that constantly appear, there

are regulars. One of the great challenges for a booking department is to get bookers away from the tendency to book the same people. I suppose if you ask producers, the biggest limitation is that we often use the same people over and over again. But that's not because we want to, it's because often we're up against the gun. So we're always looking for new faces, we're looking for new takes on the same old stories. We don't want to use the same people over and over again, although the people we use often share the same characteristics: they know the story well, they can talk quickly about it, they can respond quickly, they have a certain amount of attitude, you can have an opinion, and they have great energy. These are the things we're looking for. But we're always looking for new people, so it's not like we're always looking for the same people. One of the things you can do is you can watch the broadcasts, look at the kind of guests that are on there and if you have somebody that fits that profile then pitch away.

When it comes to access to the shows I think email has made it a lot easier. I'll hand my card out to anybody, I'm really the contact person for the dayside. If it's a prime time show I can get the information to the producers that you need to do. I'm not going to say you should limit anything, I think that the more information that we have, the more access that we have, if you've got somebody and you think it might work, send it to me. The only caveat I will add is: don't expect me to respond immediately back and say, "Thank you very much, we're thinking about it," because often we get deluged by so many offers that it's impossible to answer each one individually. That doesn't mean we haven't gotten it. We'll get it, we'll look at it, we file it, we get ready for it and we may come back one or two months later on a client (hopefully he's still your client) and we will definitely do that. We definitely pay attention. Access, if you want to follow up with a phone call that's fine, we may not be available but we definitely will keep that information. But it helps to narrow it down. It helps to narrow it down to being aware of what we're looking for, being aware of what the programming is like, like I said we don't do cooking demos. So if you've got an Iraqi athlete I'd pitch that, I wouldn't pitch the cooking on the manifold of a car author, I guess that guy's still out there Manifold Destiny was his name. We used to do that on GMA but we don't do that at MSNBC.

So quickly: watch the programming, get a sense of what it is we do, as I said we do mostly hard news, news of the day. If you know what the stories are and you can come up with a way that your client will cross over into that territory, I think we'll be fine. Access: send me as much of the stuff as you have, I'll be happy to look at it, I'll pass it along to the other booking producers, I'll pass it along to the producers of the shows. And we're really open to this. We can't know about a client unless you tell us about that person so you have to come to us with it.

The other point you talked about was pet peeves and I really can't think of any. The only pet peeve I can come up with is if you take things personally. In other words, you've sent me 40 emails and I haven't answered them. When I finally do call, you're mad. Don't take it personally, I mean, we'll call, we will book the client. We're looking for people who are good, and if they're good we'll book them again, and if they're really good we'll book them again and again and again. If they're *really* good we'll sign them to a contract and your client will make a lot of money. So that's really the way it works at least in all of the broadcast outlets that I've worked in.

I'm trying to think, is there anything else you wanted me to cover? Ok, thanks.