

Hey, Darley Newman, How'd You Create An Emmy-Winning Travel Show, *Equitrekking*?

**'Producing for public television is the ultimate
entrepreneurial outlet'**

By Andrea K. Hammer – June 28, 2010, MediaBistro.com



Darley Newman has braved a hailstorm atop an Alberta mountain, survived an earthquake in Hawaii, and explored Jordan's Wadi Rum Desert. And she's done it all on horseback as host and co-producer of her show, *Equitrekking*.

Winner of the 2009 Emmy for Outstanding Single Camera Photography and nominated for a second year in the Emmy Award's Outstanding Special Class Series category, the PBS show takes viewers around the world with local people on horseback, exploring history, culture and food. After first creating a website with videos and a blog at

Equitrekking.com in 2004, *Equitrekking* debuted in New

Mexico in 2006 and nationally in 2007. The show is now broadcast in more than 30 countries. In addition, Newman has written a companion coffee table book, *Equitrekking Travel Adventures on Horseback*, and launched the affiliated travel company EquitrekkingTravel.com, featuring horseback-riding vacations across the world.

"It's really difficult to get into broadcasting," says Newman, "but the good news is that there are many new outlets through various types of media." Here, she tells us how she did it.

How did you conceive and pitch the concept for this show?

I had experience working in TV and radio, and my main passions were horseback riding and travel; so I pitched the series concept to a small, niche network. With creativity and luck, I secured advertisers for a pilot episode. I then took the pilot to a PBS station in New Mexico, which agreed to broadcast the episode, as a test run. I was fortunate to secure sponsors for this broadcast as well, particularly because finishing costs increase significantly with a move to broadcast television. The ratings and response were surprisingly exceptional, and we used that test case to pitch national distribution. I recruited friends and family to help along the way. The key was to keep building on each success and making the series better and stronger by extending the concept to multiple media outlets.

How did your broadcast experience lead to your own show, and which of those skills continue to inform your work?

During one summer in college, I was a contract camerawoman. I filmed a local South Carolina TV show and government meetings, which also involved setting up lights and carrying some heavy gear. Later, I filmed an open-heart surgery for a medical documentary. When you're carrying equipment and setting up lights, you realize how heavy and hard that job can be, but also the creativity involved in telling the story through film and even lighting.

I learned about budgeting by managing cash flow and accounting for a film production company. I felt the stress and excitement of coming up with my own stories working for *48 Hours* at CBS New York. I was on air as a reporter covering the White House and Capitol Hill for The Talk Radio News Service in DC. I also did freelance public relations to pay the bills while I worked as an independent producer at the start of *Equitrekking*. It's the diversity of the various positions I've held that's helped most. Though each was not exactly what I wanted to do in the long run, those skills have helped me with everything I do today.

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How has the show changed since you first began?

Equitrekking has gotten better and evolved. Overall, we've quickened the pacing of each episode and gotten faster at producing each segment because we know what we're looking for. It was trial and error at first. We've learned a lot and made mistakes as we've progressed, tackling everything from broadcast technical specifications to planning international shoots. Each episode of *Equitrekking* gets better as each member of our production team gets more experience producing this specific series. When you travel to exotic places to film like Uruguay and Turkey, you have to get as much as you can while you are there and do it right because it's not to easy to return.

Do you watch yourself on tape? What adjustments have you made?

I do a lot of the show's editing, so I get to view myself a lot. I've become more relaxed during filming because I'm used to having a camera in my face now. I've also become a better listener from a production standpoint because I'm acting as a host and producer in the field, so there's a lot I'm thinking about on each shoot. The crew's input is crucial.

What elements of the show have contributed to your Emmy win and nominations?

Equitrekking is different from anything on television. We introduce the viewer at home to a place through the local's eyes. We let them show us their favorite mountain views, best beaches, best local markets and the best of an area that may not have been covered by other media because we're in the off-the-beaten path locations, many of which are only accessible on horseback.

How does working for a publicly funded organization impact your work?

Public television fits with *Equitrekking* well. The series is educational and intended for a general family audience. Though we cover equestrian themes, we also focus on travel, history and adventure. As a public television series, we are responsible for soliciting sponsorship. Today's advertising and increasingly segmented television markets make this a persistent challenge. However, given time and consistently strong ratings and global

distribution, the burden has eased, and we've developed some innovative strategies for cross-promotion and other media inclusion that provides our sponsors with measurable return on investment.

Though publicly funded, producing for public television is the ultimate entrepreneurial outlet. The producers are responsible for everything, from content to meeting technical specifications. The risk comes with producing -- at the highest broadcast standards -- a TV show that will rate well and resonate with viewers.

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How do you keep up with media outreach and juggle this task with other responsibilities?

When you run your own business, you're always pulled in many different directions and find yourself learning to do things you never thought that you would. I do as much as I can and have a part-time marketing associate who helps me. For media outreach, I use skills learned from my time doing freelance public relations. I follow journalists and outlets that cover topics related to *Equitrekking*. I write columns for two different magazines, my blog, and content for newsletters, so that helps keep me on top of writing and coming up with ideas to generate more buzz.

How would you advise someone interested in becoming a "go-to" expert?

If you're going to devote a lot of time to something, it should be something that you're really interested in. You need to have as much knowledge of the subject as you can, which takes time. It's helpful to make your advice and expertise available, which you may have to do without pay at first. If you are open to being a resource and you have the knowledge, then you have a good chance of being used. Each success builds on the next. Sincerity is key. Contemporary audiences are sophisticated: They've seen it all and will see right through an insincere or lackluster personality.

Newman's tips for landing your own broadcast gig:

- 1. Get experience in related fields.** Don't discount smaller production companies and startups. Those can be great places to gain a variety of skill sets. Sometimes you might have to work for little or no money to gain experience, but if you're working toward a long-term goal, doing something to gain skills in the short run can be helpful later.
- 2. Don't pitch the same old stuff.** Come up with something creative, figure out your audience, and then knock on doors. If you can, partner with a company with experience for your first series. A mentor who will take the time to advise you can help tremendously. You may meet these people on the job or through local networking organizations or friends.
- 3. Think creatively about where you can fit in as an authoritative voice on the subject.** You may not get a hosting gig right away, but if you can gain more experience in the field, you're that much closer to your goals.