

# *So You're Gonna Be a Paranormal Star!*

**The media calls and wants you, your footage or your photos. What do you do? Here's how to get the most mileage out of your media relationships, and avoid common mistakes!**

There comes a time at some point for those of us actively capturing images “from beyond” when (finally!) others start to take notice. It can start with family and friends being bedazzled by your otherworldly orb shots or unmistakable EVP's. Perhaps, suddenly *they* start noticing “these weird things” in their photos, too! Maybe you've made your guests gasp at your gliding ghosts on videotape? Whatever the case, it seems to others as if you just might be onto something! Then the circle of exposure widens and maybe you have a website that is garnering attention from the masses, like newspapers and radio programs, maybe local news or even national TV shows. This is great! However, there is plenty to know before swimming with the sharks and having your hard earned image, reputation and materials devoured by piranhas.

You may have spent years researching a particular haunted location or worked endlessly on compiling paranormal data, footage or photographs. If your work is truly unique and sound (not faked, forged or manipulated in any way) it has value – both to you personally and to the media outlets that want to use it in their program or publication.

After working in this field professionally for about 20 years, I have appeared on many television shows, several radio programs and in numerous print publications, *not* counting any internet venues. I have been consulted on dozens of paranormally based shows and programs and have been approached or contacted to participate in literally hundreds of these media opportunities. It doesn't always work out that you'll actually get the show or article, or that it will show you and your materials in a favorable light. Out of all of the media opportunities I have accepted... I have been *monetarily* paid for my participation – ONCE.

It actually costs me money to participate in any of these programs! Hosting the film crew in your home is not easy (trust me), driving to locations, your time away from your real job and/or home (days to weeks), and money spent at the location (food, refreshments, etc.). It can get tiring and expensive, not to mention the damage a film crew can leave behind – I've actually had entire carpets ruined because of the tape they used to secure cables and wires and had plants burned because of their lighting techniques, etc.

In terms of exposure though, I was “paid” each time my name, image, logo or URL was shown or mentioned. If you consider how much advertising costs (relevant to each type of media outlet) it is definitely a form of payment. I got publicity and they got fodder for their show or publication.

So how does one put a price on this type of material? There really is no “going rate” on ghost photos, video clips and EVP’s. This decision has to come from you and the value you place on your materials.

Another way to look at it is the sharing of knowledge factor. What good are those photos doing you or anyone else tucked away in an album or in some computer file? If you have something incredibly enlightening, entertaining, educational or whatever, why not share it with the world? We can all help and learn from each other, so put it out there! This is the reason I’ve written these guidelines for negotiations when doing an interview and/or supplying video footage, paranormal photos, haunted locations and researched or documented information – to help those unfamiliar with this area to learn from my mistakes and perhaps avoid pitfalls you may never have seen coming. To begin with:

- 1. The show/publisher has a budget.** Ask if they are a local cable show or publication, or a syndicated cable or TV Show or publication.

Find out if they are a **DGA** (Directors Guild of America) or **WGA** (Writers Guild of America) signatory. If they are either of these then they belong to a union and will have a **much larger budget** than other non-union shows. This information will help you to better negotiate any monetary deals. These groups will also take the terms of the contract seriously and will not “bend the rules” in their favor as much as a smaller outfit might. Most likely these programs will be featuring YOU or YOUR FOOTAGE in a segment.

Production companies are like “*energy thieves.*” They would prefer to take everything from you for nothing if possible. Countless times I have been asked to provide haunted locations, information gathered over years of research, or even other contacts. The union shows will pay \$ *and* give you adequate exposure, but you must *ask* for it! Smaller-budget companies may not have a monetary payout but can give you fair-to-good exposure. Public access shows generally have no budget and are run by volunteers of the studio company. No blatant advertising is allowed on public access but you can have taglines and get your info out there by stating lines such as “For more information on XYZ Company, contact ABC at, etc.” With a small outfit you need to make sure it is the kind of exposure you want...

- 2. Know what you’re getting involved with!** Ask what kind of publication, show or program it will be: What is the audience demographic, and what is the *slant* of the show’s story? You could be seriously risking your reputation if you release your footage to a “gossip rag” or other “Enquirer” type of tabloid. You’ve read the way they write the articles, the slants they tend to take and one can only imagine what they would do to “ghost photo.” If it’s a TV show, be sure to find out if it’s one with a religious bent as they may also have an agenda other than your own. Often, and especially, with live shows these die-hard religious types will try to box you into a corner or ambush you with unexpected, antagonistic questions. You may even be purposely misinformed to make you or anyone with your type of material intentionally look “bad,” “evil,” or similarly “against” their belief system. This in turn could generate tons of unwanted “hate mail,” email clogging, etc. Any publicity is

NOT always good publicity. ALWAYS get the show idea/outline in writing before agreeing to ANYTHING. **You must be the one to ASK QUESTIONS!**

### **Simple breakdown of a Production Company:**

1. **The Producer:** A producer initiates, coordinates, supervises and controls, either on his own authority, or subject to the authority of an employer, all aspects of the motion-picture and/or television production process, from inception to completion -- including creative, financial, technological and administrative, and all other talents and crafts, subject to the provisions of their collective bargaining agreements and personal service contracts.
2. **Co-producers** are two or more functioning producers who perform jointly or cumulatively all of the producer functions as a team or group.

It is highly unlikely that you will be in contact with the producer or co-producers.

3. **The Executive Producer (EP):** The executive producer is responsible for supervising the entire creative process - from treatment review to final delivery on original, co-production and reversion projects. He/she is head overseer and main contact with the TV stations' operations board or other media facility providers. They must review, edit, and approve preliminary and final treatments, outlines, shooting scripts, scripts, production schedules, budgets, selects, graphics, music, rough cuts, fine cuts, final narration and final versions of all assigned programs. In television, an executive producer may also be the creator/writer of a series.

It is NOT likely that you will be in contact with the executive producer.

4. **The Coordinating Producer (also known as the *Senior Producer* or the *Production Coordinator*):** A coordinating producer coordinates the work of two or more individual producers working separately on single or multiple productions in order to achieve a unified end result. The production coordinator reports to the executive producer and provides creative and administrative support. The production coordinator serves as a point of contact for shows assigned to the executive producer and determines how inquiries should be handled. He/she works closely with the EP to ensure deadlines, budgets, and deliverables are met.

You want to initially speak to the coordinating producer but most likely will be contacted by associate and segment producers or directors.

5. **Segment Producer:** The segment producer brings ideas, talent (YOU) or materials (YOURS) to the coordinating producer for approval. They will want you to provide them with your locations and the BEST of your materials. Then they present it to their superiors for their consent to include you or your footage in the show. They themselves do not make the decision to include you or whether or

not you will be paid for inclusion. They are basically the middleman between you and the higher-ups. So, any promises they make may not be kept, because they do not have decision-making power.

**6. Segment Director:** Directs individual segments. They will be the ones telling you and the crews what to do, and what scenes or scripts need to be shot.

**Do NOT engage in contact with any of the following:**

**Researchers, Writers, Location Scouts, Schedulers or Managers** – these are the hired help. Thank them for their interest but make the call as brief as possible. These people are only out to pick your brain and get you to build their networking databases and do their work for them. They are usually hired by the segment producer to make calls and find talent/footage when the producers have “better” things to do. After asking a million-and-one detailed questions they will then ask for a “referral” of another related group or location in some other state or even country, which is not only a waste of your time and energy – it’s an insult. It happened recently for a well-known but now cancelled SyFy show that the producer actually “bait and switched” me by stating they wanted to do a show with CosmicSociety specifically. After providing a truly haunted location and having the homeowner sign a contract (ONLY because they believed it was to involve CosmicSociety, I was informed that the show was “already cast” but that they (the network) was looking for me to be featured in a totally different program – after the fact. Luckily for them, I happen to be very good friends with the other investigator and allowed them to keep the location after convincing the homeowner it would be ok. Long story short, it was all bullshit to get a location for another team. How pathetic! All they would have had to do was be honest up front – I am all about helping like-minded friends and associates! Why should psychics and ghost hunters be expected to give away their time, talent, materials and knowledge for free? And worse, under false pretenses...

### **The Phone Call**

When the call comes in from the segment producer, the first thing you want to do is hear their request. If it sounds like something you might be interested in, you need to then establish your professionalism immediately. Do this in the following ways:

1. First ask for the name and contact information of the coordinating producer. (They should at least give you the name).
2. List any and all previous media exposure you have had. List any and all titles, memberships, or affiliations with any relevant organizations. This tells the segment producer you have prior experience and your materials have been approved by other shows in the past.
3. Don’t agree to anything right away and don’t seem overeager. It is exciting when you get a phone call to be included in a TV show, especially if its one of the big

networks. A natural first response for those of us who are just regular people -- not movie stars or celebrity actors -- is to jump at the chance to be highlighted and have our photos and/or footage showcased. It's okay to be enthusiastic in your conversation with them but you must keep in mind that they *want* you to be in awe, so that you will give your time and materials for free or next to nothing. Remember! They NEED YOU and YOUR MATERIALS in order to produce a segment – this is your leverage and bargaining chip. One great way to stall for time (to think about how you want to handle this) and to come across very professionally and seriously at the same time is to tell them to fax (email only if no fax) their request on company letterhead with all specifics and that you will give it your immediate attention and get back with them within a specific time range. Tell them to include:

- a. Station, publication or production name.
- b. Program or series name that the interview and/or footage is to be used in.
- c. Context of interview and/or footage. (How and in what way will it be used).
- d. Length of exposure. (How long approximately will you and/or your footage be aired?)
- e. Program or series format. (Is the show a comedy? Drama? Reality? Etc.)

### **Reaching an Agreement**

If the show makes an offer, be sure to remember to consider the time involved (don't forget what your knowledge and past research are worth) and then decide if the payoff will be worth it.

Once the determination has been reached between you and the production company to use you and/or your materials, the negotiation begins\*. There are ways, in addition to money, to be compensated.

1. **Exposure.** Your contact information should be viewable. There's probably nothing more important than having your name, address, location, website url, or email address aired *during* the program. You want the people watching to be able to contact you while they are engaged in the program, while they are interested and still at that channel. With a publication, your contact information should be contained within the article or listed at the end. Period. If people can't find or contact you, what's the point?
2. **Slates and Taglines.** "Slates" and "Taglines" are the lines of text that usually appear on the lower left of the screen with Your name on top and occupation or affiliation with the context of the segment underneath. I always prefer my name with my website url slated, but its not always easy to get producers to agree with this. They will usually use my name and the term Professional or Local Ghosthunter underneath. Negotiate how you want the slate to appear. Ask how long your interview will be slated. Will it be slated each time you appear on the screen? Start by suggesting that the URL info is viewable for the entire footage segment or its airtime. They may not agree to this, so you might have to bargain

down but do insist that the URL info is viewable for at least 8 seconds. If, for some reason they refuse to slate you, stipulate that the host or announcer “state or verbally announce” during the course of your segment, your contact information. How else will anyone be able to contact you? If your not getting monetarily paid for this gig, you best get some publicity out of it.

3. **End Credits.** End Credits are basically a waste and worth nothing to you. If this is what they offer you, you should not be interested. More and more shows and commercials are interrupting the ending credit scroll by using a split screen (and shrinking down the scrolling text) or cutting it off completely. It is usually standard procedure to have your info here but as stated, having your name in the end credits, especially without contact information is virtually useless.

### Protecting Your Materials

1. **Keep YOUR Footage YOURS! READ THE CONTRACT!** There is so much to a release contract that it would encompass the entire *Cosmic Connections* newsletter. So I'll highlight areas that I've learned about the hard way.
  - a. **Your URL.** Always stipulate that your website URL is embedded within ANY materials you provide. With a publication, be sure your copyright is displayed with any photos or materials (this includes any written materials you have agreed to allow usage of, from a book or newsletter for example).
  - b. **Overlapping.** Be sure the production company agrees that the URL info/slate will not be overlapped or obscured by any other material, graphic image or design. I was reminded of this during the holidays while watching a local news channel who were allowing overseas military to send TV greetings to their loved ones back home here in CT via their news station. It was a great thought, but for one family it must have been exciting to see their son or daughter on the screen, and then suddenly disappointing when their grandchildren's faces were completely obliterated by the stations slate and call letters! (Good publicity for the station but not good for the viewers)
  - c. **Limited Usage.** Find out if the TV show or Radio station intends to use your interview, footage or materials ONLY in this show or if it will be aired on “sister-stations.” Look for the term “Blanket Use” in the contract – this will “cover” them to use your footage in other outlets. If you choose to allow “Blanket Use” then be sure you are compensated for *each* airing or appearance that you are involved with. The licensing rights should be limited non-exclusive. This means the footage (audio-video), photos or materials, in addition to your interview, should only be used or limited to the particular program you are working with, NOT in some other show or promotional production – as set forth specifically in your agreement. They must agree to NOT to release, distribute or sell your materials to any other third or outside party with express written consent.

- d. **Keep Your \*\$#^&!! Together!** Make sure you express that your interview (audio-video) be used only in conjunction with your materials. You don't want your voice associated with or commenting on a totally different photograph or clip than the one you were actually describing. Along the same lines you don't want your footage shown with some other "expert's" dialogue. It could come across as if they were the originator of the material or that your dialogue doesn't match the footage, etc.
- e. **Copyrights. GET YOUR MATERIALS COPYWRITTEN!!** Do this by sending a copy of your work (make sure it is NOT the original) to the Library of Congress with whatever the going fee is per copyright. The production company must agree to be bound, by contract, to uphold and protect all copyrights held on materials by you, in all territories. Notification of any violation of the materials will happen immediately upon any knowledge on their part of such violation by the company to you.

The thing that really irks me about these production companies is that our materials and hard work trying for years to gather ghost images, etc. MEANS NOTHING TO THEM. If you're like me, some of your ghost pictures are very close to your heart and have emotional, personal value. They will just as soon sign away your rights and use your stuff without caring. Keep this in mind when going over the contract. Sometimes it's just not worth the price of "fame!"

In part two of this article, we'll assume you've negotiated an awesome deal and move onto what you need to present at your on-camera interview and make your airtime work for you!

\*As with anything of extreme importance always consider a professional's opinion. In this case there are lawyers who specialize in entertainment industries negotiations.

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