

How to get Booked on Oprah!

By Susan Harrow

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How to get Booked on Oprah!

By Susan Harrow
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Most people believe that getting on Oprah will make them a millionaire, their book a bestseller or their business boom. For your career to take-off like the last space shuttle, you must prepare to make the most of your appearance. Here are some hot tips to help you get invited as a guest on the show, rivet your audience on the air, and ultimately sell yourself along with your product(s) or book(s). As a media coach and marketing expert, I have helped many people get booked on Oprah, so I know there is a strategy that, if followed, will help anyone increase their chances of getting on the show.

Pitch and prepare.

Before you actually get booked on Oprah, you need to know how to pitch an idea to the show's producers and how to prepare yourself for the big day.

1. Tape and watch Oprah.

At least a dozen hopefuls call me every year for media coaching or to help them create a marketing plan. The first words out of their mouths are: "I want to be on Oprah." When I ask them if they watch the show 90 percent say, "No." Part of preparing for success is becoming familiar with the content, format, rhythm and pace of the Oprah show.

Your first step is to record two to four weeks of Oprah. Then, sit down in a comfy spot and watch them all at once. This will give you a sense of what's hot on Oprah for the next few months. (It does

change and go in cycles). Notice which producers (listed on the credits at the end) are responsible for each particular type of segment. Send a producer information only after you are sure of who you'd like to approach and why.

2. Pitch a hot topic.

Never pitch your yourself, your speech, your product or your book. Instead pitch something that's newsworthy now: a pressing national issue, a controversial subject, a problem for which you have the solution, a common myth debunked. Propose a topic that is relevant to Winfrey's audience (controversy, relationships, personal triumph, makeovers) then prove you are the expert on that topic by telling only the information that is relevant to the idea you're pitching.

For acting coach Cynthia Brian, speaker and author of "Be the Star You Are!" (Celestial Arts), we created a pitch about how she helps teenagers work out their problems by role-playing with them on camera. We proposed a makeover show with before and after footage for parents with difficult teens. Although the show idea isn't directly related to her book this is an area of Brian's expertise-and Winfrey has been doing a lot of shows around parent/teenage relationships. Think about the areas in your personal or professional life where you're an expert and connect that to a provocative theme.

3. Put together a winning press package.

Send your book (if you have one) along with a pitch or angle page with two or three different ideas, and a paragraph bio highlighting your expertise as it pertains to your pitches. Be as brief as possible. You must be able to sell your idea in one page. Remember Oprah producers get hundreds of packages every day. If possible include a two-to-four-minute video of you on other talk shows or doing a presentation to a group. If your demo video includes talk show clips, cue it up to those segments. If not, cue your video up to a short segment that shows you speaking succinctly so the producers can see that you're a viable guest.

4. Explore the show's Web site.

Winfrey's Web site, <http://www.Oprah.com>, has as much information as you will ever need to get on the show. There, you can review her entire wish list of subjects. She even makes it easy for you with a link called, "Be on the show." With the touch of a key you can send an e-mail that will reach her producers instantly.

Make your topic relevant in a short paragraph to receive a quick response. Let the producers know that you'd be glad to hop a red-eye at a moment's notice to be a part of their show, and you increase your chances of being invited.

5. Create 6 dynamic sound bites.

Mark Twain defines a sound bite as "a minimum of sound to a maximum of sense." Sound bites or talking points, are the essential messages you want to convey. Talk out loud the most important ideas, concepts, and points of your topic as they relate to the idea you are pitching.

Ask yourself, "What do I want my audience to remember?" Carla Winter, the niece of Sol Wurtzel who ran Fox Film (20th Century Fox) with founder William Fox described the success of the studio this way: "For Fox Film it was an excellent director, a good story and a box office star." In her book, *The Myth of the Perfect Mother* (Contemporary Books), Jane Swigart says, "Being a mother is like asking half the population to do brain surgery without sending them to medical school."

These memory nuggets consist of anecdotes, facts, statistics, stories, or something unlikely, unusual, controversial, shocking, funny, humorous, romantic, poignant, emotionally moving, or dramatic.

6. Make sure you're blurbable.

By definition, a blurb is a very short advertisement or statement about a topic, product or idea. For example, many book jackets have blurbs about the book, or what people have said about the book. The average sound bite on television is 10 seconds, so it takes some intensive practice to say something meaningful about your book or topic in such a short period of time. Practice with a timer until you can speak your message in 10 to 20 seconds.

7. Get booked on local shows first.

Even before you consider approaching Oprah with your idea, get practice on your local news and talk shows. This will give you a chance to fine-tune your sound bites so you won't be shocked by the speed of national television. Many people don't realize that the Oprah Show isn't a platform for their subject. When you're on the show as a guest you'll typically have a total of one to seven minutes to communicate your entire message-in 10 to 20-second increments. Once you have a good feel for the rhythm of television, you'll feel more relaxed and ready.

8. Wow the producers with brevity.

Remember, the moment you open your mouth you are auditioning. Keep your list of talking points by the phone when you call a producer (or a producer calls you) so you'll be succinct. You will already have rehearsed them so that they sound natural and inviting. Make sure all your points are targeted exactly to the angle you're proposing-making you (and your product or book) irresistible on the air.

Smile! You're on Oprah

Now that you know what it takes to pitch an idea to Oprah, you need to know what to do when you actually appear on the show.

1. Connect with your eyes.

It is very important to maintain eye contact with Winfrey 100 percent of the time when she addresses you. This means while you're talking and while you're listening. Audiences believe that you're sincere and knowledgeable if you keep consistent, soft eye contact.

2. Create a "Top Five" list.

Help your audience remember you by developing a "Top Five" list to be projected on-screen so all your key points will be illustrated visually as you discuss them. This is also a secret way to keep Winfrey on track. Once she's stated that you'll cover five points, she has to help move you through all of them or her audience will feel cheated. Making this list guarantees you more airtime.

At the request of the producers speaker and author Victoria Moran, who wrote *Lit From Within* (HarperSanFrancisco) created a quiz for a show on vanity with questions like, "Are you constantly comparing your appearance to other women's? Does the way you look in the morning determine your mood for the day?" After Winfrey got her guests to answer, she asked Moran to comment. She got five chances to speak-totalling one minute and 33 seconds.

3. Bring visual props.

Visual props add liveliness and helps your viewers remember your points, which indirectly translates into buying your product or book. Let the producers know how you plan to use your prop(s) ahead of time. During the show you also need to direct the cameraman to your object by pointing to it or holding it up to cue them for a close-up.

4. Introduce yourself with a stellar sound bite.

On television your very first utterance sets the tone for all the information you plan to deliver. Say something that instantly brings focus to your most important message that ties into your book.

With dedicated practice, channeling your passion, enthusiasm, and knowledge about your subject will come across to your audience, and people will naturally want to know more about you, your products and your services.

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Description:

How to Get Booked on Oprah!

12 insider's tips to getting booked on Oprah. Discover what it really takes to get on the show and become a media sensation. Learn to make the most of your appearance on the air--the key to catapulting your business!

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