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INSIDE

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the kings OF MIAMI

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How to Talk Like a TV Executive

It may take a bespoke suit and the latest model BlackBerry to look like a network executive. But to truly be one, you have to learn how to sound the part, too

By Jim Colucci

As newcomers to Television City quickly discover, network executives have a vocabulary all their own. *Watch!* enlisted Kelly Kahl, senior executive vice president of program operations for CBS, for a crash course in the dialect spoken behind the network's Technicolor curtain.

For example, when a writer pitches a new series, Kahl says, executives evaluate whether the idea is **IN OUR WHEELHOUSE**. "It means that it's our kind of show," he explains, "the kind the network has had success with in the past." Of course, it's often the mold-breaker that becomes the next breakout hit. And so, **SWINGING FOR THE FENCES** is network lingo for taking a chance on something new—and hopefully ending up with another genre-bending megahit like *CSI* or *Survivor*.

Decisions about which potential shows to put **ON THE BOARD**—yes, networks still use big magnetic wall boards to build their fall schedules—are often based on buzz, which, Kahl admits, is "notoriously difficult to define." A **KILLER PILOT** is a new show with good **BUZZ**, meaning it has Hollywood talking about how it seems destined to become a hit. Some less fortunate pilots **SCREEN WELL** (network execs like 'em) or **TEST WELL** (test audiences of regular folks like 'em)—but not both. Their fates

are determined only after the network decides what to do with its shows **ON THE BUBBLE**, that is, current series teetering on the verge of cancellation. "Typically a network has anywhere between three to five bubble shows," Kahl says. "So they end up competing not only with each other, but with the new pilots to see what makes it onto the air."

Whichever shows make the cut, the strongest are set for the fall as **ANCHOR SHOWS**—"your killer show on any given night," Kahl explains. "It defines the night for the network. No matter what's going around it, it's a little pillar of strength."

Confusingly, an anchor can also be a **TENTPOLE** (a show, often at 9 p.m.), which is strong enough to support the entire night. Then, between tentpoles and the 8 p.m. **LEAD-OFF SHOW**, executives often **HAMMOCK** an unproven show or two.

"It's classic scheduling strategy," Kahl says. "*The New Adventures of Old Christine* is now a strong show in its own right, partly because when it

Two and a Half Men, The New Adventures of Old Christine and CSI: Miami

started, we hammocked it between *Two and a Half Men* and *CSI: Miami*."

If a show doesn't fit any of these roles, execs know they can always keep it **IN THEIR BACK POCKET** for mid-season, as they did a few seasons ago, with *The Amazing Race*. That way, there's a replacement ready in case some new show **FLAMES OUT** (burns brightly at first, but then quickly plummets like a comet)—or simply **LAYS AN EGG** in the ratings.

Of course, the network hopes at least some of the new shows will **POP A NUMBER** (score unexpectedly high ratings). Then the executive gets to keep his job, and may even get promoted and buy a new **PORSCHE**—which is one example of network speak that requires no translation. 📺

