Producing for TV and New Media
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Producing as a career and a lifestyle grabbed me years ago, but like many of the people you’ll meet in the pages of this book, I didn’t start off as a producer. Writing was my passion. I liked the process, and was able to earn a living with feature-length screenplays (eight were optioned and one made...badly), short stories, magazine articles, movie reviews, educational curricula. Then, after moving from L.A. to NYC, I was offered a job at NBC as a writer/producer. I knew what a writer did, but a producer? I said yes immediately—I’d figure out the producing part later.

That simple yes was the launch pad for this journey called producing for television—and now, for new media—that shows no sign of slowing down. I’ve written and/or produced hundreds of television hours in almost every genre, for NBC, CBS, ABC, PBS, for broadcast and nonbroadcast, from two-minute movie trailers to two-hour in-depth documentaries to a CBS special.

Each project has exposed me to a range of experiences—I can research new ideas, then write the scripts; I’ve shot in locations from the exotic to the mundane; I get to play with footage and sound and graphics in postproduction; I almost understand the parameters of finance; I’ve had the pleasure of interviewing celebrities, academics, and visionaries, on-camera and off; I’ve tested the range of my own patience and endurance; and, best of all, I’ve been honored to work with, and learn from, extraordinarily creative and talented people.

Producing has always felt natural to me. As the oldest of four kids, I mastered the skills of delegating, nurturing, cajoling, and outright bribery at an early age. I could convince my brother and sisters that making me a sandwich was a noble task rather than drudgery. When I was 12, I started a summer vacation newspaper, The Shack, and I gave each sibling a job: to report a new deer-sighting, draw treasure maps, make up riddles, sell ad space. I wrote the lead stories, designed it, and gave myself top billing...in essence, I’ve been producing all my life.

Producing is in my DNA. My parents were documentary filmmakers back in the day when nonscripted content was a labor of love, poorly funded, and rarely seen by large audiences. With a small dedicated crew, they directed, produced, and shot documentaries around the globe, shooting for weeks at a time. Through them, I learned about exotic places with unpronounceable names, heard stories of trekking into areas where the only common language was a smile. They loved what they did: the planning, the shoots, the weeks of editing. They found challenges and payoffs in each phase. And above all, they valued teamwork.

This family collaborative, its passion and fun, has shaped my world view of producing; it’s also been essential in producing this book. My mother, Allie Clayton, provided nonstop inspiration, much of the book’s graphic format design, and transcribed hours of interviews. My oldest daughter, Joan Johnsen, was also a valiant transcriber; Jonna McLaughlin, my middle daughter, and her best friend Becky Teitel, contributed their sage advice and experiences as former students of producing and now are producers themselves; and my third daughter, Simone McLaughlin, essentially constructed the
glossary. My husband, Jeffrey McLaughlin, shared his considerable knowledge of postproduction, and supported me throughout the long writing process with his belief in my vision. Overseeing this family endeavor is the generous guiding spirit of my father, John Clayton, whose humor, vision, and belief in his team were the stuff of legend. His grin could light up any set.

Writing this book allowed me to explore my own producing experiences, and to combine or contrast them with those of dozens of other professionals interviewed for both editions. Each chapter was reviewed by a team of college students who were studying producing and offered their candid feedback and perspectives. Jackie Muldower contributed unswerving support, extensive research and review, and compiled references. Adam Wager offered his clarity to the text and its overall tone. Michael Krepack gave me consistent access to the latest developments in new media; Ashley Cooper Kerns, Joanna Kerns, and Nicci Marcian helped reshape, clarify, and update the legal chapter. Daisy Montfort and Noah Workman chipped in long hours on behalf of this book, and Alexandra Palmieri, Alex Holson, and Jaclyn Paris contributed to the Student Recommended Resources. I'm eternally grateful for this collective dedication to my dream.

An added dimension to this text is the collective experience and insight from the “guest speakers” in Chapter 11: Sheril Antonio, Sharon Badal, Michael Bonfiglio, Sheila Possner Emery, Barbara Gaines, Rich Henning, Ann Kolbell, Matt Lombardi, Jeffrey McLaughlin, Brett Morgen, Stephen Reed, Laurie Rich, John Rosas, Tom Sellitti, J. Stephen Sheppard, Valerie Walsh, Justin Wilkes, Scott A. Williams, and Bernie Young. I’m indebted to my friends and colleagues Sharon Badal, Stephen Duncombe, Evan Fairbanks, James Gardner, Rich Henning, David Irving, Jon Kamen, Al Lieberman, Lynn McVeigh, Linda Oken, Andrew Susskind, Justin Wilkes, and the Bradley-Jones team, who believe in me and in the potential and power of television and new media, and have stood by me through some dicey moments. Thanks also to Amit Das who convinced me to expand my original Producing for TV syllabus into a textbook. And a deep bow to Kent Cathcart, my sole touchstone in high school, whose struggles with me back then have paid off.

An integral part of the book’s development process are the proposal reviewers—Don Caristi, Miscelle McIntosh, Mary Beth O’Connor, and Eric Scholl. Equally as helpful were the manuscript reviewers for the second edition, Alison Reddihough and Andrew Susskind. Each made significant contributions with his or her candid feedback. The folks at Focal Press, under the thoughtful guidance of Elinor Actipis and Michele Cronin, have combined their talents to make the second edition even better than the first. The graphics, charts, and photographs were imaginatively designed and photographed by Polina Khentov; all these people are partners in this book.

Producing for TV and New Media: A Real-World Approach is the end result of collaboration, experience, curiosity, a bit of good luck, and a lot of hard work—a formula that’s remarkably similar to producing for television and new media. Welcome to the journey.
Cathrine Kellison’s career as a writer/producer spans two decades, and includes an eclectic range of projects—from a CBS special to a PBS documentary, from corporate image pieces for IBM to behind-the-scenes celebrity interviews for MGM, from a kids’ piece on recycling to educational films for teachers. To date, she has produced, written, and/or directed hundreds of hours of broadcast and non-broadcast programming for television and various avenues of new media.

Starting as a writer of feature-length scripts in Hollywood, Ms. Kellison moved into producing for NBC and, later, United Artists in New York City as Director of Creative Services. She then went independent, starting her own small-but-meaningful production company, Roseville Video. Ms. Kellison began teaching producing for television and film at New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts in 1994, and now teaches and advises students of media studies in NYU’s Gallatin School of Individualized Study and SCPS (School of Continuing Professional Studies).

Ms. Kellison works as fluently as a writer, authoring or co-authoring a number of books and articles primarily in the Affective Education domain and in mathematics education reform.

Ms. Kellison is a member of the Producers Guild of America, the Writers Guild of America, the Independent Documentary Association, and has won numerous industry awards, including two WGA awards for Outstanding Achievement. She lives and works in New York City.
Know what you don’t know.

Stephen Reed, producer (interviewed in Chapter 11)

If ever there was a succinct description of the producer’s role, “know what you don’t know” defines it best. To succeed as a producer, you become a lifelong learner—constantly researching, asking questions, and listening. Not stopping until you know what you don’t know.

There isn’t one producer in any area of television or new media who has all the answers, or has mastered the tricks of the trade, or grasps the nuances of each and every detail on the producer’s to-do list. Although producers share certain skill sets, each genre in which the producer works is different. Each project requires a unique result from its producer. This book strives to lay out the producer’s many roles and options, and the steps generally taken in producing quality programming. As importantly, there’s an almost philosophical approach to the people skills required in producing: communication, understanding, respect, and an ongoing sense of humor.

There’s no doubt that new media takes us on an exciting romp into the unknown. Its potentials and risks grow exponentially. The expansion of new media content and delivery systems is the subject of countless panels and articles, yet it’s still in its infancy. We’re in the vortex of what could possibly be one of the more transformative eras in human communications.

Television is the mentor of new media content, and at almost 80 years old, TV has shaped our world for generations before us. Television now is pervasive. It reaches literally billions of people around the globe; for many of them, TV is their sole source of information and entertainment. So regardless of our own viewing habits, TV has had a resounding impact on the data, the culture, changing trends, and the economics that inform our world.

Yet, TV initially was dismissed as simply a passing fancy, “an inventor’s will o’ the wisp.” Over subsequent decades, its detractors have been harsh and outspoken, insisting that TV caters to the lowest common denominator, that it barrages us with negative impressions, controls the content and delivery of news, manipulates cultural trends, and encourages viewers to contribute to the consumer society.

But the tides are turning. Current research increasingly points to television as a vehicle that, when used intelligently, can actually make its viewers smarter. We can make thoughtful choices that lead us to navigate complex narrative plots, explore ethical issues of relationships that are central to reality programming, compare and contrast political platforms, learn a language and explore its culture, and in general, pique our appetite for further exploration.
And joining in, new media. It’s fast on its way to going beyond traditional television, into uncharted territory. Within this range of viewpoints, it’s indisputable that these media offer opportunities that are virtually limitless. Here’s where the producer enters the picture.

**TV IS THE PRODUCER’S DOMAIN**

A plasma screen, a computer monitor, a mobile phone—each is simply a mechanical device that can receive digital signals. Each is similar to a blank canvas that’s ready for the artist’s brush. It’s the role of the producer to create an image on the screen—painting that canvas. The producer can stand up to television’s critics by using creative vision, technical know-how, and a rather extraordinary set of skills to produce unique programming and to open new directions.

**TELEVISION LIVES WITHIN AN HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

May you be born in interesting times.

A curse in Ancient China

Today’s producer certainly lives in “interesting times.” Few periods in human history have been as dramatic or as enlightening—or as uncertain. TV and the Internet are both reflecting and shaping what is happening in the world around us, and flooding us with data and impressions. It falls on the producer, and of course the viewer, to become educated about it all.

Television has over a century of creative and technical history behind it that’s rich in insight and provides a foundation for programs that we watch today. In America, we can see echoes of Steve Allen’s 1950s’ late-night humor and hosting style in shows hosted by David Letterman and Jon Stewart. Legendary performances on the BBC and dramatic U.S. series *Playhouse 90* and *Hallmark Hall of Fame* upped the ante for superior acting, writing, and directing that is still seen every night in dozens of network series and premium cable programs. Early children’s television gave us *Mr. Wizard* and *Mr. Rogers*, paving the way for *Sesame Street* and *Dora the Explorer*.

Yet television’s detractors target, rightfully, the predominant themes of competition and humiliation in “reality shows,” or the evening news broadcasts—once reported by courageous pioneers in journalism like Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite—in which news is constricted by upper-management dictates, or focuses primarily on the sensational and shallow. Explicit music videos and adult-only channels have lowered the bar of constraint, as mature content seeps into family programming; concurrently, the vital issues of censorship and essential freedom of speech are challenged by political and economic pressures. The pros and cons of television are in constant flux, and with new media entering the arena, the debates will surely continue to flourish.

So where does it all go from here? What is television’s future? Where does new media factor in? That answer is up to the producer. The producer can choose to go with the flow, or dare to divert the direction of that flow.

**TV IS A UNIQUE MEDIUM**

Recently, both business and academia have held the word “television” up to the light: Is television that wide-screen set in front of your couch? Or is TV what you watch on your laptop or on the hand-held device you take on the plane? They’re all capable of playing the same rerun of *Seinfeld*, or tomorrow’s weather forecast.
It doesn’t matter. An effective producer can take advantage of the newest delivery systems or stick with traditional television, but the skills needed for producing remain constant. The producer continues to create compelling entertainment, in-depth information, or educational content. Once a stable industry unto itself, television is now smack in the middle of a radical transformation as it merges with new media.

The TV set continues to be a staple in most households. It’s a familiar voice in the background; an antidote to loneliness. As with a family member, we can enjoy it, tune it out, argue with it, or laugh out loud. We don’t have to leave the house, hire a babysitter, or pay the high price of admission for feature films and documentaries—we’ll eventually see them on our TV set.

**THE PRODUCER IS AT THE CORE**

Some producers are responsible for bringing an entire project to life, from a simple concept through development to its final broadcast or distribution. Other producers work on specific areas of a project and are a valuable part of a larger team of producers. The parameters of the producer’s functions cast a wide net: producing is the least understood job in television. It’s also the most demanding and time-consuming of media jobs, and yet a natural-born producer loves (almost) every minute.

The skills needed to be a producer are rather like the tiny pixels in a television image. Each skill deals with detail, and each detail is important. Like pixels, it takes thousands of them to create an image on the TV screen.

This book explores each stage of producing a project:

- Stage One: The Idea (Project Development)
- Stage Two: The Plan (Preproduction)
- Stage Three: The Shoot (Production)
- Stage Four: The Final Product (Postproduction)
- Stage Five: Next Steps (Wrap Up and Distribution)

Producing isn’t just about mastering the details. A producer also has a clear vision of the “big picture”: the current marketplace, the changes in technology, audience demographics, the trends of the day. She or he reads the industry publications, actively watches programming in specific genres, and seeks out opportunities to learn more, to gain an edge.

**PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employment in the motion picture and video industries is projected to grow 31 percent between 2002 and 2012, roughly double the 16 percent growth projected for all industries combined.” Demand for content comes not only from networks, cable and premium channels, and satellite, but also from burgeoning new media, such as the Internet, cellular technology, video-on-demand, and gaming, along with nonbroadcast venues.

And the international market continues its consumption of the latest hit show or newest format idea, primarily from America and the United Kingdom, increasing its audience base and advertising revenue. As an industry, television and new media both offer a range of options to the producer—from a staff position at a national network to working with a news producer in a local television station, from segment producer to working on a network show as a writer/producer. Producers in video may opt for being freelancers, or independent with their own small companies that produce content for broadcast, corporations, documentary channels, or educational distribution. Like the industry itself, the options for a producer are expanding on a daily basis.
THE PRODUCER IN THE DIGITAL DOMAIN

Producers now work almost exclusively in the digital domain. Most of the producer’s integral tools are digital—the computer with its software for writing and editing, the cameras, the formats on which to capture the image and record the sound, the editing and mixing systems, and the technology of the delivery system. Each aspect of production and postproduction processes takes full advantage of these technological advances. We now live and work in the digital domain; this book focuses on these digital tools and on the producer’s relationship to them.

ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT

The Roles of the Producer

A producer’s role is as much about working with people as it is about the many phases and details of producing. The producer may have a marketable skill such as writing or directing, but the inherent role of the producer depends on collaboration with others. The strength of this relationship between the producer and the creative teams, the crew, the talent, the client, the vendors, and the dozens of other people along the way is what propels and accomplishes the five stages of production just listed.

The primary purpose of this book, then, is to look closely at this teamwork, and to explore the ways in which each individual on the producer’s team functions. What does a director of photography bring to the project? Will you need a location scout? How does the script supervisor make your job easier? At what stage do you hire the editor? Should you consult an entertainment lawyer for each contract? And, most importantly, do you have the necessary “people skills” that can keep this team together?

There are five overall stages of producing, and inside this book, 10 chapters are devoted to this journey. The reader gets a step-by-step explanation of the producer’s jobs, from the initial idea of a project to its final distribution process, from concept to contract.

Chapters 1 through 10

Each chapter delves into a specific area of producing, from an overall perspective on the many jobs and titles of a producer, television's history, its current state, and its possible future, to the five stages of producing a project, the details of budgets and breakdowns, legalities and rights, pitching and selling, and the ever-important people skills.

Each chapter opens with talking points that cover the highlights and main points of that chapter’s material. Various anecdotes from the author, “In the Trenches,” join with memorable quotes, and excerpts from the 19 professionals’ interviews in Chapter 11 are scattered through each chapter, as well as commentary on the personal side of producing, “On a Human Level.”

Chapter 11

This chapter offers interviews with high-profile, experienced television and new-media producers, academics, and other industry professionals. These 19 contributors talk candidly about their jobs: what they do, how they do it, the people they work with and depend on, their day-to-day functions, and the balancing act between their professional lives and the personal. Their producers’ titles range from executive producers in network television to independent producers of documentaries or nonbroadcast material. Industry professionals share their insights ranging from legal issues to festival submissions.
Just like a compelling guest speaker in the classroom, or a mentor in the workplace, each shares his or her stories from the trenches. Each offers a unique perspective on producing.

1 Added Features
Throughout the first 10 chapters in the book, each contributing producer and industry professional from Chapter 11 shares pertinent information through:

- **Top Ten Lists**: The top ten aspects of professional success as noted by its contributor
- **Sound Bites**: Salient excerpts from the interviews in Chapter 11
- **In the Trenches**: Each chapter has at least one anecdote from the author’s experiences
- **Let's say...**: Various “what-if” examples
- **Graphics**: Charts, formats, and maps
- **Quotes**: Some of the best global, media, and historical minds offer their thoughts

The Glossary
The words or terms of the language of television, new media, and communications are explained in the glossary. Each word in the text is italicized, referring the reader to the glossary.

2 The Web Site
Every producer uses specific forms and legal agreements in organizing and protecting his or her project. In the web site that accompanies this book, there are a variety of templates for most forms and agreements that working producers use on a daily basis. The web site also offers a variety of resources, including an extensive Books and References section, web sites, and more. The web site can be found at http://booksite.focalpress.com/Kellison. Its contents are listed in the Table of Contents.

3 Note to the Instructor
In tandem with this textbook, the Instructor’s Manual offers an overview of the material, as well as a per-chapter classroom-tested syllabus, opportunities for classroom interaction and individual student projects. To access this material, contact your Focal Press sales representative, or go to www.textbooks.elsevier.com.

4 Note to the Reader
You may be a student of television and its gradual convergence with new media, and you’ve enrolled in a plan of study that explores the role of the producer. Or, you have an idea you think could be expanded and broadcast. Or you may be an experienced producer who is actively involved in producing content and who can benefit from an updated approach to the technical and creative aspects of producing your project.
Regardless of the category into which you fall, this book has been researched, designed, and written for you. It is the first book of its kind to fully explore both the “big picture” and the small details of producing for both television and new media. It can be part of an overall curriculum, or provide helpful creative and technical guidelines for the independent producer. This text aims to present the realities and possibilities for the producer, one who is ready to devote time, energy, and passion to producing quality programming and content in this extraordinary period of media expansion.

Put simply, this book promises to help you know more about what you don’t know.