

Practical advice on how to safeguard your format

1. Write it

Format ideas come from anywhere and everywhere — a random thought, a what-if moment, a Tik Tok video. When inspiration strikes, don't just think about it, write it down. Then work out your potential format in as much detail as possible before sharing it with anyone else. Create as detailed a format bible as possible as you craft and refine your concept.

Need help? See FRAPA's Bible Generator.

2. Illustrate it

Ninja Warrior's obstacle course. *The Voice's* rotating chairs. *The Masked Singer's* costumes. Most successful formats rely on unique set designs, props or game elements to ramp up the drama and deliver a distinctive visual hook. These design elements can be used to help protect your IP and establish it as an artistic work under copyright law. If your format includes any visual USPs, don't just describe them in words, illustrate them — in 3D, if possible.

3. Sizzle it

If you can afford to do so, create a sizzle reel to show how your format should look, feel and work. Make sure to incorporate all of its distinguishing features, including design features, game-play, graphics, animation and voice-overs. By creating a strong first impression, sizzle reels can also help to sell a format before it has actually been produced.

4. Name and Domain it

Come up with a snappy title. Even if your buyer eventually goes with a different name, a strong working title can help grab attention and create intrigue even before anyone hears your pitch. Once you've decided on a title, register it with the generic top level domains (such as .com) and the country code top-level domains (such as .co.uk) in your core target markets. It's also wise to register any related usernames on the key social-media sites. The pre-broadcast registration of both domain and user names can help pre-empt 'squatting' or using a domain name in bad faith to profit from the goodwill of a trademark belonging to someone else. It also ensures that you don't inadvertently become a squatter yourself.

5. Register it

Become a member of FRAPA if you aren't already! All members have access to a free, world-class consultancy service that provides professional help and guidance on all aspects of IP protection and infringement. FRAPA's expert team can also advise you on the best course of action to take should you believe your format rights have been infringed.

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6. Keep a record of it

Keep a running, ongoing log of all the activity generated by your format idea from inception through to every pitch, email and phone call you subsequently make. Be sure to date any idea, or any modification to any idea, on every page of every document you craft related to that idea. Also remember to record of the author of every concept, amendment or update to avoid ambiguity regarding creative input later down the line.

7. Shop it

When you start pitching your format, request that any third-party signs a NDA before viewing your idea. If this proves impractical, make clear — in writing — and at every opportunity that your format is confidential and cannot be used or exploited without your consent. For good measure, stamp the cover and each page of your format bible with 'confidential' and include your FRAPA membership logo on all documents. The latter signals that your concept is backed by a global organisation representing the format industry's most powerful players.

8. Refresh it

A static format is a vulnerable format. Evolving your concept not only keeps it abreast of buyer and audience feedback, but it also keeps it fresh, relevant and, crucially, one step ahead of imitators. Potential innovations could include turning a one-off show into an arced narrative series, adding new elements to the game play, or extending the brand into apps, merchandise, fan experiences and home entertainment. This will help to reinforce your format's status as a creative work while reducing the risk of third parties profiting from your success by, for example, developing an app based on your IP.

9. Social it

Social media is no longer an optional extra for TV formats. At the pitching stage, buyers will want to know what hook they can use to promote your show across the social platforms, so make sure you bake this into your pitch. Once your format is on air, social is great for creating buzz and providing feedback as to what's working for audiences — and what's not. The social networks also have a role to play in protecting IP by helping to generate interest and accumulate 'good will' in your format, which can assist in building a case against 'passing off' (when the goodwill associated with one party is appropriated by another party for their own benefit.) Counter intuitively, negative online feedback in a rip-off show can also be used to establish reputational damage to the original format.

10. Manage it

Keep your format bible as up-to-date, accurate and forensically detailed as possible. If there are versions of your format in more than one territory, be sure to gather and include those same details from each international version, including any 'lessons learned' by each production. The more information you can commit to paper about your show, its constituent elements and the know-how needed to produce it, the greater your chances of protecting it under law as an original literary work. This means it is protected under copyright law and that action can be taken against any party suspected of infringing your copyright.