



Danny Fenton, CEO and executive chairman, Zig Zag Productions

Selling formats into China

China may be synonymous with the term 'global superpower' with regards to politics and technology, but when it comes to TV, it remains a relatively untapped, emerging market with enormous potential.

Zig Zag was first introduced to the idea of visiting China by Zespa Media, an agency in the UK that specialises in introducing British producers to the country. It's not a legal requirement to use an agent to get access to the broadcasters, but it certainly helps having someone who knows the local culture and language. We wouldn't have gone there without an intermediary.

My colleague and I, Zig Zag USA boss Matt Gould, were invited to China by the state broadcaster Chinese Central Television (CCTV) to discuss ways in which we could help its producers with developing ideas while doing some pitching of our own.

Just to give you an idea of how powerful CCTV is, it has around 17 channels in its arsenal. The main channel, CCTV-1, has an audience of 1 billion people.

We were guests of Mr Wu, who is head of procurement at the channel. Some 300 producers from dif-

ferent state channels attended the three-day conference in which we did a series of presentations and spoke to them about the art of coming up with format ideas.

They then pitched us their ideas, which couldn't have been more broad and varied.

After the three days were up, we were invited to pitch to CCTV-1.

It couldn't have been better timing for a UK indie as it was the day before the channel launched the much-anticipated *Clash of the Choirs*, which it acquired from Shine Group's sales and distribution arm Shine International.

It was also the broadcaster's first procurement of a major international format, which again shows that there is a thirst for international content.

On the whole, China has never successfully imported or exported any formats of note. So, as we were there to help the Chinese create their own formats which could then travel internationally, we pitched a number of ideas which were warmly received with the intention that at least one of them will go into production. Watch this space.

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They were particularly fond of our factual entertainment formats, so we agreed that should they wish to take any, we would coproduce and joint-own them before exploiting them worldwide.

Business aside, we were treated as a mixture of royalty and rock stars. Every meal was like a banquet and at the end of the conference, all the Chinese delegates wanted to have their picture taken with us. We were also hit by a series of questions about how we could improve their formats. Indeed, the amount of questions gave us a good excuse to avoid eating bull's penis with fried worms and bees.

We found the experience incredibly educational and culturally enriching, but also recognised that China is a rich vein that UK indies can tap into if they are prepared to enter the unknown. **TBI**

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