

WHO WANTS  
TO BE AN  
EXECUTIVE?  
NBC's Gaspin



# HERE'S THE PITCH

BY B. J. SIGESMUND

**E**ver since reality TV broke big, network executives have opened their office doors to a parade of producers, who come bearing ideas good, bad and very, very ugly. NEWSWEEK asked NBC's Jeff Gaspin if we could sit in on a day's pitch meetings. Gaspin is the network's executive vice president in charge of

Who dreams up reality shows like 'American Idol'—and do the networks ever say no? Inside a meeting at NBC.

alternative programs. This summer he'll unveil "The Restaurant," about the opening of a swank Manhattan eatery, and "For Love or Money," in which a bachelor chooses a mate

without knowing that the winner will actually have a choice of prizes: his loving arms or a million bucks. On the day we visited, Gaspin had his most eventful meeting with two

British producers, Sebastian Scott and Henrietta Conrad, and their American ally, Ben Silverman. Some of the shows the team came to pitch were already on the air in England, just as "Pop Idol" and "Survivor" were before America imported them. Excerpts from the conversation:

**Sebastian Scott:** OK, the first one's called "There Goes the Neighborhood." Three neighbors decide who

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should move into the house next door. But they have to do it without ever meeting the person. They are only allowed to go around to that person's current home and make decisions by what they find inside their kitchen or living room—or in photographs of them. We also watch the people whose houses are being gone through watch these strangers go through all their drawers. At the end of the episode, the neighbors reject one family. On the next episode, they get to go through all the trash of the remaining families. At the end of the episode, they reject another family. And so on.

**Jeff Gaspin:** So the people looking to move don't really do much, right?

**Ben Silverman:** They do nothing. They're just witnessing this invasion of their privacy.

**Scott:** In England, there's a huge pornography of property. People cannot get enough of looking inside other people's houses. They want to look in that bedside drawer to see what's kept in there. Anyhow, the next show is a hidden-camera show, which starts tomorrow.

**Silverman:** It's being paired with "I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!"

**Henrietta Conrad:** Which is huge in England.

**Scott:** We like B-list celebrities over there.

**Conrad:** We like losers. We like losers, and you like winners.

**Scott:** This hidden-camera show is set in an office. It's called "Office Monkey." Two people in the office are competing to win a vacation, but no one else in the office, other than the *über*-boss, knows that they're playing this game. They get e-mailed tasks to perform every two or three hours, which they must perform without getting the sack. It could be anything from sitting at your desk drinking beer to turning up to work in a chicken suit.

**Gaspin:** So the boss knows?

**Silverman:** The *über*-boss knows, but not the supervisor. And most of the firms are telemarketing guys, because we want them in cubicles. Another thing that might happen is one guy tests the ring tone 15 times on his mobile phone. And his

## 9 TERRIBLE IDEAS

NEWSWEEK polled reality-TV creators and executives for the most outlandish pitches they've ever heard. It gives us no joy to report that all of these are 100 percent real. OK, it gives us a lot of joy.

**1 'I've Got a Monkey on My Back!'** Contestants face off in a cross-country relay race, only instead of passing a baton, they hand off... a monkey. The producer who heard this pitch immediately (and jokingly) suggested a spin-off called 'I've Got a Goat on My Shoulder!'



**2 'Will You Adopt Me?'** Preteen orphans and potential foster families meet on television. America votes on which kid gets which family.

**3 'Human Autopsy'** A one-time special depicting an actual autopsy. Alternate title: 'CSI: My Auntie.'

**4 'Who Wants to Donate Their Sperm?'** Like 'The Bachelorette,' except the woman doesn't want the guy—just his DNA. Nine months later, the woman delivers the baby on live TV.



**5 'Untitled 'Bachelorette' Rip-Off'** In which the woman has a big surprise for her potential Prince Charmings: a penis.

**6 'Strip Search'** In the tradition, a contest to find America's best stripper. It's 'American Idol' with lap dances.



**7 'Mail-Order Brides'** OK, this one's just sick: men choose between, say, a Thai bride and an Ethiopian bride.

**8 'Convict Island'** Real prisoners try to escape from a real prison. The winner's victim(s) get the prize money.



**9 'Pimp House'** Six real-life pimps together in a house. No challenges, no voting. They just live in the house and they pimp.

co-workers are just sitting there.

**Conrad:** Or they might have to show their new swim trunks to their co-workers. So they have to pull their pants down. And one of the guy's a bit overweight. You get to see people's faces, people reacting. **Scott:** Then we have a show called "Back to Reality," where we get all our favorite stars that have been featured on the many reality shows and bring them together for a two-week special. Every day they have to perform tasks. The idea is that you get "Joe Millionaire" next to "The Bachelorette."

**Gaspin:** I have been pitched this before—twice. I've always liked it. Here's why we didn't do it. Every network now has these people signed up for at least one year. You

cannot get anybody current. So you can get Richard Hatch and you can now get the first "Bachelor." But you cannot get the most recent "Bachelor"—not that you'd want him—but you can't even get Aaron Buerge. He's still under contract with ABC. You can't get "Joe Millionaire." And we [at NBC] have not really turned out a lot of stars, so we don't really have a lot of our own stars to use. That's the problem with it. We were pitched "Battle of the Reality All-Stars" a year and a half ago. I wanted to do it. That's when everybody started to get savvy to locking the talent in. You can get the first group of "Survivors," if you can even remember them. Yeah, if I could get "Joe Millionaire," I'd do the show right now.

**Scott:** Another show we have in production right now is called "Little Monsters," where kids decide who their favorite adult is. They get adults to do a series of tasks—everything from messy, dumb tasks like mud wrestling to endurance tasks to tasks where the kids get to throw things at the adults. And we go from six adults to the favorite.

**Gaspin:** And how old are the kids?

**Scott:** They're like real-life Bart Simpsons. This is like giving Bart the chance to make that decision.

**Gaspin:** They vote individually or decide together?

**Scott:** The kids have to decide together. They have to argue between themselves.

**Gaspin:** Forget it, they'll never agree!

**Scott:** If there's a split, the adults have to perform another task.

**Gaspin:** Kids say crazy things. You get a lot of gold out of them.

**Scott:** The next one we're doing is, "Britain's Most Useless Teenager." If there's a universal truth in the world, it's that kids don't know how to open a can of beans. They don't know how to iron a shirt.

**Gaspin:** My kid lays on the bed watching TV and goes, "Dad! Dad!" I run in. "What's the matter?" He goes, "I need a tissue." This happened last night. I'm like, "You can't go get a tissue?" He looked at me all serious and says, "I don't want to miss this."

**Conrad:** Did you get it?

**Gaspin:** I did.

**Scott:** Well, we're looking for him, and more. They start off by doing domestic tasks in the home. They have to clean the house to the mother's satisfaction. They have to empty a mousetrap. They have to clean a dead bird out of the gutter. They have to wear a uniform in the local fast-food outlet. They have to go be nice to old people. They have to look after a baby.

**Silverman:** This is about improving kids. You win by doing better.

**Scott:** The ages we're going for in the U.K. are 17, 18, 19.

**Gaspin:** The most useless years.

**Scott:** OK, that's it.

**Gaspin:** Thank you all. There was a lot of stuff here. I'll think about it. ■

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