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“Who Wants to Be a Millennial?” Game Show Production

Lauren Lewis

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“Who Wants to Be a Millennial?”
Game Show Production

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors
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Honors Capstone Project in Television, Radio, and Film

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Date: May 6, 2014
Abstract

When deciding to produce a pilot episode of a television series, I thought about the type of entertainment I wanted to see on TV but had not yet seen. I thought to myself about the themes of entertainment that could resonate with my generation. I decided to combine the interests of the Millennial generation with a game show competition including popular culture and social media themes. I wanted to emulate this traditional genre of television while capitalizing on a new, emerging audience. I had witnessed this same production tactic successfully create The American Bible Challenge when I interned at Game Show Network during my Syracuse University semester in Los Angeles.

I took on this challenge independently, even though different production departments typically collaborate to create final products in the media industry. In this way, I experienced all aspects of the production world by being exposed to development, pre-production, production, and post-production. I honed the skills necessary to design a treatment, organize a production set, manage a cast and crew on-set, and edit together a program in its entirety.

After this undertaking, I am confident that I could work professionally in any given department. In addition, I am confident that I could create an independent work if necessary. “Who Wants to Be a Millennial?” turns out to be a creative, comedic product of a new generation, combining classic competition with reality-style television.
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Executive Summary

Producing a game show was never my original plan. In fact, taking part in any sort of production tasks intimidated me as a young student with no experience on-set. I originally designed my capstone as a research paper based on the use of animals in television and film. I had planned to design a contact packet for Syracuse University students in order to use different types of animals for student films. I felt that many of the films I was seeing in my classrooms were overwrought with the same social situations between humans constantly; I was hoping to use my Capstone as a catalyst to encourage students to reach beyond conventional production ideas, even when limited by student accessibility.

I pursued this topic until I gained experience at several internships in TV. I noticed that the television world was about latching onto quick, trendy ideas—following the ever-changing scope of the media industry. I became more comfortable constructing treatments and pitches through experiences with professional executives. By engaging in industry experience, I started to realize that I was capable of creating a true television product beyond my imagination as a student. I realized that anyone could pitch a television show; however, to pitch a show well, it was almost necessary to have a produced pilot on-hand. I saw that even executives had put together rough cuts of their work, and I became confident that I could put together a similar product regardless of my age or level of experience.

To begin developing my program, I thought about the type of entertainment that I wanted to see on television and that I had not yet seen on
television. I decided to combine the new trend of Millennial culture with my inherent love for game shows. I had previously interned at Game Show Network in Santa Monica during my Syracuse University semester in Los Angeles and I became extremely intrigued by the process of game show development. I wanted to involve the Millennial audience by including opinion rounds using social media platforms—updating the traditional *Family Feud* model. I wanted to include trivia rounds with questions that would surprise viewers as well as capitalize on their unique popular culture knowledge. I wanted to hit on classic game show trends while engaging in fresh trends, like replacing traditional “blue vs. red” teams to the Denim team versus the Red Flannel team.

It was most difficult constructing this game without the support of a development and production department. I found myself looking to bounce ideas off of other people, because in the end, a show needs to appeal to a wide audience. On a game show, people have to want to *watch* the show as well as visualize themselves *being* on the show. This stipulation is different than most genres of shows. Were prizes and pizzas enough to get people to play my game? For this reason, I conducted research by interacting with Millennials and Millennial television professionals to build the show’s concept. I realized that successful programs are born out of following trends and surveying a targeted audience.

I used my experience at Austin’s South By Southwest festival to engage myself in the television production culture with professionals specializing in cracking Millennial culture. Because the term “Millennial” has never been purely
defined, there is much discussion surrounding its meaning. Through my observations, I have concluded that Millennials are educated, liberal individuals born between the early 1980s and the early 2000s that are open to the future and have a taste for media culture.

I listened to panels discuss ways to connect with the younger generation, as well as brand tactics and material that they anticipated would be successful on television. Through this experience, I was able to explain my take on Millennials to professionals and receive feedback on my television treatment. Building on my emerging confidence in the television industry, I was not afraid to approach these executives with my ideas; they were always willing to listen, always looking to hear original ideas. I took control of my project. I took their advice and applied their suggestions to my rewrites.

I experienced “Development Hell” by restructuring my treatment several times based on many different people’s opinions and technical limitations. I have learned in my classes that the development process can take years, and I finally experienced how many different perspectives build a program. I learned firsthand that the television industry is about working together over a long period of time through different departments and different specialties; however, through this Capstone project, I got a small taste of each department and now I would feel comfortable if I were ever confronted by any type of production task in the future.

Pre-production followed development and I was forced to change my idea for the production’s set based on technical incapabilities on campus. I learned how to coordinate a production space and how to restructure my plans to create
even more innovative ideas when necessary. I became a schedule coordinator for my cast and crew as well as a set-designer. Production planning is vital; however, as a planner, I learned that I must always be ready for any unforeseen factors.

During production, I experienced the responsibilities of a director. Even though the program was a reality-based show, I still needed to give direction to the people on-screen. I began to understand how reality television shows are conducted. I found myself almost participating in the drama to encourage the chaotic energy that I wanted to be emulated on-camera. I also needed to give direction to the people behind the cameras. I was constantly making sure that certain takes were caught on film and no technical difficulties were taking place with recording.

I took on the editing process independently as well. It was difficult to gage the comedic timing at first; however, I began to catch onto the humor-style as the rough cut came together. The overall style of the show came together naturally—a home-grown, “quippy” comedy. I showed the rough cut to Professor Coffey halfway through the month of editing, but the product was lacking the game show quality without the bells and whistles, the scores and the sound effects. Once the graphics and the special effects were properly placed, the game show production came to life and became my own.

This capstone is a true testament to my experience in the television industry over the past four years. Without learning the basics about production and communication standards in my introductory classes, my understanding of the industry would be lacking. Without internships, I would never have the
confidence to invest myself in creating content for television. And without the opportunity from this Capstone to produce my own material, I would never have been able to create a unique piece of work that reflects my own place in the television industry. I hope to take this pilot to pitches in the workplace and produce even more creative content based on new trending audiences in the future.

Development

I have always been addicted to game shows. After interning at Game Show Network in the production department, I became familiar with constructing all different kinds of game show treatments. I brought my idea of an academic game show designed for Syracuse University students to my Capstone advisor, Neal Coffey. The categories would correlate with classes at the University, each player would individually compete Jeopardy-style, and the pilot would be pitched to the University’s Orange Television Network. He approved the idea and I had to begin recruiting participants to compete on-screen.

After talking to my friends about my idea, they all agreed that they would not participate on a trivia show without being on a team. In fact, they would not answer questions alone without conferring with the team. I did not realize this sense of insecurity amongst the audience that I was targeting. From here, I began to conduct more research on the audience that I was targeting—mostly the Millennial generation. I found that it was difficult to come up with strong ideas independently, without a collaboration team. The idea of production departments
and pitch meetings in the professional world began to make sense. The strongest television shows are borne out of teamwork and rewrites and innovative ideas—and this takes a long time to develop. Hence the popular production term “Development Hell.”

I drafted my first treatment for “SYR 101: An Orange Game Show,” focusing on Millennial popular culture. To take this point further, I wanted to involve my Millennial audience in deciding the answers to the questions, much like Family Feud. I wanted to capitalize on social media platforms and send around a survey for Millennials measuring outside opinions so as not to have another “boring” trivia game. In this way, I was able to compile additional research on Millennials firsthand. I also was looking to capitalize on the Syracuse collegiate audience to target an even more specific audience. The complete treatment can be found below:
After showing this treatment to Professor Clifford, she advised that I design an original set that Millennials could relate to instead of following a traditional *Family Feud*-style game show set-up. We came up with mirroring that of a coffee house, which eventually served the feel of the project well when—through technological difficulties—the production had to be filmed in my living room.

As I was writing the questions, I could tell that using Syracuse as an entire round’s topic was limiting. A question like “Favorite place to eat in Destiny USA?” was not as far-reaching as a question like “Favorite place to grab a quick bite?”—exploiting trendy fast food places like Chipotle and Panera, a popular bit amongst Millennials. I found that by limiting my audience to a college campus, I was limiting the appeal of my vision. At this vital turning point, I decided to push my production in a more universal direction, ditching the college television network approach and pitching the project in a cable company’s direction.

I started to follow the new trend of social competition shows on television. MTV’s *Are You the One?* gathered a group of young people looking for their pre-determined perfect matches amongst each other on a tropical island and filmed the process and the drama following the game. I wanted to have the players participate in a game while truly emphasizing the reality drama of the overall situation.

From here, I finally envisioned the shoddy-style of filming I wanted to see and the over-dramatic types of relationships between the players I wanted to
experience. I drafted up my final treatment with preliminary graphics, which can be found below:

**Who Wants to Be a Millennial?**

This game aims to test your knowledge and your imagination, and it's "best" played in teams of 3-6. But if you're playing solo, don't worry! The fun isn't just for two!

**Intro:**
- There are 3 groups of 4 team members.
- Each team has a set of 3 separate rounds.
- You'll choose your strategy during the initial challenge.
- Each team will solve a puzzle and then try to guess the answer.
- Play will continue until the team with the most challenges solved.

**Set-Up:**
- Puzzles are divided into:
  - Game Name:
  - Multi-Seat Challenges
  - Name Challenge
  - Team Challenge
- Players can choose from:
- Fast Foodie
- Yogurtland
- Chipotle
- Jimmy John's

**How The Game Works:**
Round 1: The Sand, the Sun

- Players name teams based on different cities and/or locations.
- Each team will solve a puzzle and then try to guess the answer.
- Players will select one of 4: 24 or 32 sol. teams when selecting a title.

Round 2: Just the Facts, Ma'am
- Each team will solve a puzzle based on a given city.
- Players will name each city after identifying whether it's a city or a state.
- Each city will have a different challenge.
- Players will select one of 4: 24 or 32 sol. teams when selecting a title.

The selected title will face two questions which display this:

**Which Real Housewife's opening line is as follows: "I thank God every day for my life, and you would too"**

- Gretchen
- Alexis
- NeNe
- Kyle
After putting together a realistic vision for the graphics of the game show, I needed to figure out how to conduct the game through a program. I reached out to the Supervisor of Production Operations, Jason Kohlbrenner, and he immediately suggested that I look into a program called iBooks Author. Through this entire process, I found the best solutions to problems by reaching out to professors and other professionals at the school. This was a vital piece of information. As soon as I began to experiment with the program, my designs easily transposed to the layout of the program. The final design of the slides can be found here:
WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLENNIAL?

HE SAID, SHE SAID

JUST THE FACTS, MAN

ENDLESS LOVE
HEY JACO
SOCIAL MEDIA MANIA
PARTY ANIMAL
CLASSY OR TRASHY
FILM BUFF
SPORTY CHIC
BABY MAMA

BEAUTY SCHOOL DROPOUT
MEXICAN FIESTA
THE HATERS
BREAKING NEWS
INSTA GUESS
CELEBRITY SEX TAPE
HOUSEWIFE LIFE
DON'T FORGET THE LYRICS
After the graphics were in place and the questions were written, I needed to put together an on-set production plan. I decided to schedule a pre-production shoot to test out the camera equipment, lights, and display screen that I was planning to use for the set.

**Pre-Production**

My objectives for the production run-through were to test out what film equipment would work for my shoot and to make sure that the technology for the game show was in place. I had previously purchased an Apple TV with my minor expenses budget provided by the Honors Program to run the iBook that I created through iBooks Author and I secured access to the display screen to use in
Food.com’s Legal Seafood room. I was also testing out some fabric I bought for tablecloths and backdrops, so I could figure out how much more fabric I would need without overspending. I also wanted to experiment with camera angles and film some footage to start practicing editing the format and flow of a game show.

Some of my objectives were met. I was able to organize and receive special permission to take out additional rental equipment from the Cage for the shoot, which required making appointments with both Jason Kohlbrenner and Vince Cobb. Now, I know that I will be able to organize these arrangements in the future for the final shoot. I was able to rent out the Legal Seafood room in Food.com by making arrangements with Mary Ann Durantini so I had full reign over the space. In addition, I wheeled the large display screen from the 4th floor of Newhouse II.

Some of my objectives fell short for this initial shoot. I had planned on my cast experiencing the technology of the game and they were all prepared to arrive later that night together. Instantly, I knew that I wanted to cast my two core groups of friends because I knew they would bear all in front of the cameras. They had also been following the development of the treatment so they were prepped on the basic game show protocol. They would have come to film some trial runs; however, the Apple TV was not able to connect to the wifi and was also not complying with the Ethernet outlet located in the floor of the room. My whole plan to see how the iBook looked on screen was foiled! I was able to reach Jason on the phone but we had to make plans for a future meeting to work on the technical issue. I researched the Apple TV’s ability to connect to the AirOrangeX
network and it seems that it needs to be led through a wired connection. If this was the case, then I would need to find a set with an Ethernet outlet available; however, I only found out through my personal trial-and-error that Apple TV cannot run through the University’s wifi under any circumstance. Jason and Professor Coffey were both unaware of this fact until I was able to investigate this issue with Jason a week later during our meeting. I attempted to set up a registration with the ITS department because I would be using University-owned equipment; however, there was no way to make this technology work. In addition, there was no way to connect an iPad to an Ethernet connection all together so this sentiment was lost. A new plan needed to be created. I met with Professor Coffey to brainstorm some alternative options.

After using some time to reflect on my vision, we decided to pursue the idea of filming in my own living room. I envisioned designing my living room after a typical Millennial hangout—like a coffeehouse—and using the couches and large screen already existing in the room. The room is very symmetrical and there are three hallway openings just where the cameras could focus their shots. In addition, I would not have to constantly transport the production equipment from Newhouse and back—very heavy and delicate equipment. Professor Coffey approved of my idea and was understanding of my limitations.

Additional Research: South By Southwest
I needed to use some time over Spring Break to build up some of my ideas. I went to South By Southwest and attended several panels surrounding Millennials to further understand the culture that I have been investigating.

I first attended “Millennial vs. Brand Meet Up” run by Jon Burkhart, Head of Social Content for Real-Time Content Labs, and Nadya Powell, Managing Director of mry.com/Innovation Social. The pair explained that they set out to use community college-level Millennials to design rebranding plans for companies such as British Airways. They emphasized speed to market and the use of social media as a means for communication amongst Millennials. They introduced the idea of “Millennial mentoring,” which means that young people immersed in the media world would enter into agencies and coach experts on new ways to reach Millennials firsthand.

Most people at this Meet Up were middle-aged professionals. I was one of the only young people in the room that was not involved in their branding project, which gave me the opportunity to explain my viewpoint of Millennials in the media to the room full of older people. I expressed that it was all about the headline—the one clever quip that draws in attention and then move on to the next interesting caption. These people seemed extremely dumbfounded by the way Millennials became engaged in brands and did seek this support from the new generation.

The other panel I attended was called “#NewRules for Reaching Millennials Through Music,” run by REVOLT’s Jake Katz, VP of Audience Insights & Strategy. The panel featured Javier Farfan, Senior Director of Culture
& Music at PepsiCo, Kevin Kusatsu, A&R at TMWRK Management, and Kevin McGurn of Shazam. The professionals discussed the best way to engage Millennials using music as a connection and a passion point.

I asked the experts this question—“As older professionals, do you feel that you inherently understand Millennials or do you feel like you have to research and work to understand this emerging culture?” Their responses completely changed my perception from the first panel I attended. Farfan explained that it takes trial-and-error to connect to a new audience. Kusatsu expanded by saying that if something is good, it will be successful—a variation of trial-and-error. They were not as exclusively dependent on Millennials as the first group was. I even talked to the experts after the session and they told me to step outside of myself and immerse myself in the entire culture—not just on my own interests, or the interests of my friends. I see myself applying this advice to future audiences farther away from my own inherent interests.

**Production**

I planned to film Sunday, March 23rd in my living room; however, that weekend I realized that the Cage forgot to include batteries for the cameras in the heap of equipment. I contacted Vince to pick up extra batteries from the Cage that weekend, but I did not receive them in time to prepare and film. I began to understand that producers have to be ready for any unforeseen missteps in production preparation.
From here, I quickly pulled together another night to film with my cast. It was not easy at all; everyone had such complicated schedules to consider. Eventually we settled on Wednesday, March 26th at 9 PM, allowing only a small window of time to film. I was thankful that any time was working at all. Pizza was promised and special toppings were requested.

Wednesday came and I picked up the equipment from the Cage in the afternoon—making sure not to forget the batteries this time. I took the equipment home and spent the entire day setting up the set in my living room, double-checking that all lights and light stands were functioning, all tripods were set up properly, and all microphones were connected properly. After a couple of trips to the Cage that day to replace some equipment, the set was arranged and the technology was hooked up to the display screen through the Apple TV and the iPad. I had recruited three Television, Radio, and Film students to help me film.

The first step was making sure the microphones were hooked up properly. I would say this was the most difficult part of set-up because the sound from the different microphones was not extremely consistent. This could have been attributed to the channel set-up or potentially the equipment quality itself. Regardless, we decided on the sound and the production begun. The lighting fixtures were then placed accordingly after testing for different shadows.

I found that it was very difficult to get the players to listen to directions as the game was going on. And it was even harder to get the host to explain the directions—because he didn’t understand them either. Because “Who Wants to Be a Millennial?” is not a well-established game show, they didn’t know the rules
and didn’t truly understand the rules until the game began to be played. If I had
had more time to develop the game questions and the technology itself, I would
have had them run through a test round. Regardless, the players would not have
wanted to sit through a test round so I was stuck just working through the process
as the game was happening.

The host, Jarod, had great enthusiasm but did not retake shots using a
variety of different energies—even though I continuously asked. I would have
liked to work with a variety of takes while I was editing. The players did a solid
job of following the game and projecting animated attitudes at all times while on-
camera. I think this is what I appreciated most about the production; the players
clearly put effort into acting engaged in the game and I think it comes through in
the final product.

The same goes for the host. While I was directing Jarod, I felt that he
wasn’t listening to me; however, watching the content back, it’s obvious that he
was following the game. He was constantly interacting with the players and
changing his intonation while reading the questions out loud, adding comments as
he pleased. In the future, I will be aware that what I am experiencing on-set will
manifest differently in post.

I felt most frustrated that the players would talk a lot to each other while I
was trying to record Jarod’s lines without chatter in the background. This became
more and more difficult as we filmed for more time and the players became less
and less composed; however, this did work to my advantage. I feel that the show
really builds in terms of energy. By the App Attack Challenge round, they were fiercely cheering for their competing team members.

I looked over the shoulders of the camera-women from time to time. They seemed to understand the concept of the show and playfully filmed in the style of reality television. The footage worked very well in post and allowed for comedic cuts with pans and zooms.

I noticed that the iBook was being overexposed by the combination of the display screen light and the camera light. I decided that I would fix this issue in post and lay the iBook over the footage in Final Cut X. Using the iBook during game play was vital, however, and allowed the players to truly immerse themselves in the game. A Production Assistant was in charge of controlling the iPad during game play.

By the end of the two first rounds, the flow of the show was in order. I was very happy with what the footage looked like, but there wasn’t much time to review. The people involved had to leave and time was ticking. I quickly set up the software on my computer to record the Candy Crush level through the iPad and each team played the game separately, even though I would cut the footage together come post. This also avoided unnecessary discussion between the two teams while I was trying to focus on recording and timing.

After the Flannel Team won the game overall, we went ahead and recorded the “Friend or Foe” round renamed to the “#Friends4Ever” round, which determined the team member who knew the most about the other team members—inspired by Newlywed Game. I had prepared both teams with
questions and answers before the production and both teams had slides for their questions. The Denim Team lost and the Flannel Team was left with Jarod to be taken through the bonus round.

While watching the players answer the questions about each other, I could tell that they were excited about the concept but the questions were either too easy or too hard. In that moment, I could tell as a viewer that this round needed further development. I let the round keep moving but I knew as the director that this round would not make for ideal television. In addition, all the girls on the team knew all the questions about everyone, and Jerry—the only boy—was the one lacking. An interesting observation, but this outcome did not allow for one Master Millennial to be crowned. All of the girls had won in the end and I wasn’t very happy with that outcome.

By this time, the cast and crew were all allowed to leave. The production had taken a total of 2 hours of filming and about 3 hours of preparation time that day. I was very happy with the timing. I had anticipated that filming would take much longer; however, the players made it clear that they did not want to go over the game again and I felt that we had captured the unscripted quality of the game regardless. I cleaned up the set and returned all of the equipment to the Cage the next day.

Post-Production

I imported my footage from the three memory cards the next day in the Newhouse edit suites. From there, I put together a rough cut over a couple of
weeks. It took time to familiarize myself with the shots because I had not been behind each camera for filming. By taking time to get to know the type of footage that had taken place, I began to visualize how my show would be cut and what kind of energy would be conveyed on-screen.

I immediately noticed that the people on-screen were all going for a “laugh-out-loud” comedy approach. Many used one-liners and comments to make the others laugh. It was about their chemistries on their teams and between the two teams—even between themselves and the host. I wanted to make sure these interactions, actions, and reactions were highlighted on-screen. This required a lot of cutting back and fourth from group to group, individual to individual. As my plan for editing began to come together, I had to start actually cutting and selecting the clips to put together in the Final Cut Pro X timeline. This took the largest amount of time during the editing process.

I also watched through the “#Friends4Ever” round and realized that including this round would complicate the game. I liked that the App Attack Challenge naturally concluded the game by requiring a final wager, much like the final question in Jeopardy. It would be pushing the audience’s attention to include the bonus round. I decided to keep it as an addendum in the show’s treatment but exclude it for my final production. If this concept was ever sold to a production company or a network, the producers could edit the rounds and elaborate on ideas to make them work more cohesively.

I showed my first cut to Professor Coffey a couple weeks later and he said I had a lot of detail-oriented editing to do. Without the graphics, sound effects,
and the scorekeeping system in place, the production looked ragged and underworked. I was proud of the work I had done because it did take a very long time to sort through three cameras of footage; however, I knew that my next steps were the ones that would complete the authenticity of the game show.

I inserted the graphics of the questions on screen by recording the screen of the iPad and laying these shots over the display screen. I inserted bells and buzzers when questions were right and wrong. I installed the scorekeeping system and added the theme song to the beginning and the end. Suddenly, the flow of the game became much more digestible. I showed this version to Professor Coffey a couple weeks later and he was thrilled with the style of the product, even though it was not the glossy game show that we had originally designed to be produced in Food.com. His final critiques were making sure the scores were on the correct side of the screen, labeling the names of the players during their introductions, and adding bloopers to the end. He then saw the final cut a few days later and secured it to be presented during my Honors presentation. The entire editing process took about one month to complete.