The background features a green-to-yellow gradient. On the left side, there is a faint, light-colored circular scale with numerical markings from 140 to 260. Overlaid on this are several semi-transparent circular elements, including solid and dashed lines, and arrows pointing in various directions, creating a technical or data-driven aesthetic.

# TURNING WORDS INTO MONEY

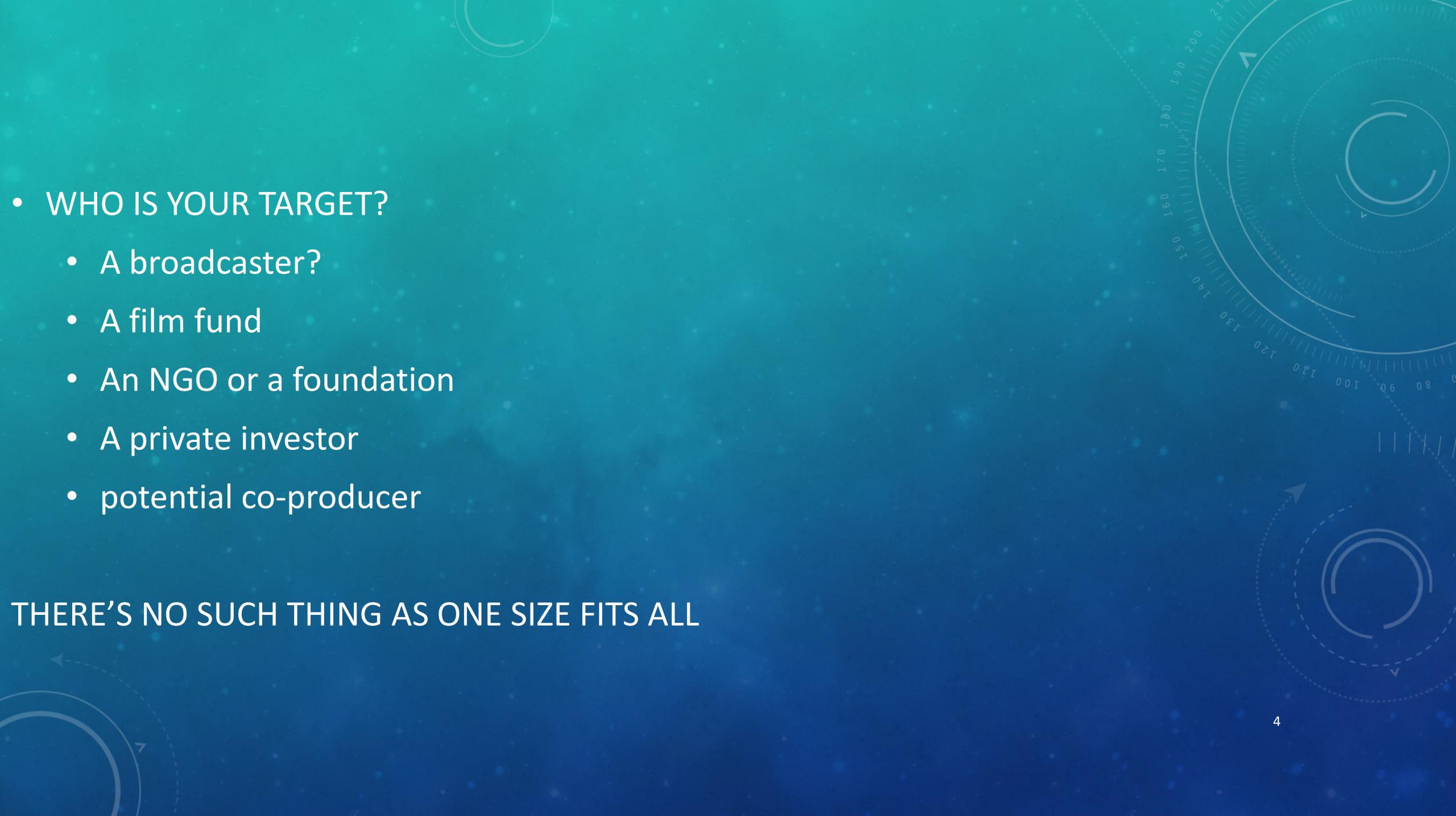
THE ART OF WRITING A CONVINCING DOCUMENTARY PROPOSAL

## PAUL PAUWELS (BELGIUM)



PAUWELS STARTED WORKING IN THE FEATURE FILM FIELD AND IN 1985 FOUNDED HIS OWN PRODUCTION COMPANY. HE JOINED FLEMISH PUBLIC BROADCASTER VRT IN 2004. FROM 2007 TO 2012, HE WAS IN CHARGE OF THE EUROPEAN TELEVISION AND MEDIA MANAGEMENT ACADEMY IN STRASBOURG. IN 2013, HE BECAME THE DIRECTOR OF THE EUROPEAN DOCUMENTARY NETWORK BASED IN COPENHAGEN / BRUSSELS.

- Proposal writing is not a science, but an art
- The "selling" arguments of each proposal are unique
  - An original idea
  - Unique access to a person or a situation
  - Innovative storytelling
  - ...
- IDENTIFY THE MOST IMPORTANT FEATURE(S) OF YOUR PROPOSAL AND MAKE THEM THE FOCUS OF YOUR WRITTEN PROPOSAL

The background is a teal-to-blue gradient with a starry field of small white dots. There are several circular patterns: a large one in the top right with concentric circles and tick marks, and smaller ones in the bottom left and bottom right, some with dashed lines and arrows.

- WHO IS YOUR TARGET?

- A broadcaster?
- A film fund
- An NGO or a foundation
- A private investor
- potential co-producer

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS ONE SIZE FITS ALL

- The written proposal is more than presenting the “idea” for a film
- It should contain the whole package:
  - Content/idea
  - Style
  - The main characters
  - Basic production information
  - Contact details and information about key personnel

WHAT IS YOUR UNIQUE SELLING POINT?

- Layout and correct language are important
- Visuals always help – one image is worth a thousand words

Each written proposal is your business card

**YOU ONLY HAVE ONE CHANGE FOR A FIRST IMPRESSION**

## KEEP IT SHORT

- Your potential funders don't have the time to read a novel
- They hate unnecessary repetition of facts
- Too many words often hide a lack of content
- Don't bury the reader under loads of details
- Structure your document in a logical and easy to absorb way
- A table of contents is not a luxury but a very useful instrument

## KEEP IT SIMPLE

- You know your subject well... the reader doesn't
- Don't be afraid to offer basic information
- Reading proposals is hard work... the reader might as well enjoy it
- Don't show off: you're not writing a PhD thesis
- If the subject allows: put some humor in

## BE COMPLETE

- Make sure that all the relevant information is in the document... but not more
- Page numbers are a must
- Put your contact information on every page – often proposals are split and shared between different people, and they might want to get in touch with you
- Do you feel that there's a need to add extensive extra documents?  
Put them in annex and refer to them

The background is a teal-to-blue gradient with a subtle pattern of small white dots. On the right side, there are several technical-style graphics: a large circular gauge with a scale from 0 to 200, a smaller circular gauge below it, and a dashed circular arrow pointing left. On the left side, there is a partial circular arrow pointing right.

**IT'S ALL ABOUT "COMFORT" FOR THE READER**

## HOW TO ATTRACT ATTENTION

- An appealing TITLE
- An attractive LOGLINE \*
- A convincing SYNOPSIS \*
- A clear and to-the-point TREATMENT \*

\* KEEP THESE SHORT AND REFER TO A MORE EXTENSIVE VERSION FUTURE IN THE DOCUMENT  
(remember the table of contents)

## THE MORE EXTENSIVE CHAPTERS

- A longer summary about WHAT you want to TELL!
  - Background information is important but not the main issue
  - Don't bore the reader with describing the SITUATION. It's all about the STORY
    - Characters and character description
    - Dramatic developments (obstacles and conflicts)
    - What is the beginning, the middle and the end of your documentary

## THE MORE EXTENSIVE CHAPTERS

- The director's vision / statement
  - Your chance to make it clear HOW you're going to tell the story...
    - Why you want to make the documentary
    - What you want to do with the documentary (style)
    - Why your are the best person to make this documentary

GIVE THIS A PERSONAL TONE AND DON'T COPY PASTE INFORMATION FROM OTHER CHAPTERS. DON'T SOUND TO IDEALISTIC OR HIGH BROW. THE FUNDERS ARE INTERESTED IN HOW YOU'RE GOING TO DEAL WITH THE STORY, THEY'RE NOT LOOKING FOR A SAINT.

## THE GEOGRAPHIC / CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

- The majority of the readers prefer short, precise and concise proposals
- France and French speaking territories prefer more extensive documents
  - Ask your co-producer for advice. He/she will know what they like
- Germany will often expect facts and figures (depending on the subject)

## CONTENT IS KEY BUT DON'T FORGET THE FACTS – KEY PRODUCTION INFORMATION

- Technical information
- Programme duration / one off / series
- HD / 2K / 4K / Film
- Summary (and realistic) schedule
- A summary (and professional) budget
- The intended financing plan

\* LET THE READER UNDERSTAND WHAT THE INTENDED “PRODUCTION VALUE” WILL BE

## FINANCING PLAN AND BUDGET

- Financing plans change often and fast – don't give to many details
- Keep your budget simple but make sure it is built in a logical way
  - Make sure it is in line with what the documentary needs
  - The first readers of your proposal are not financial specialists but they do “smell” whether your budget is correct or not checked and double check: wrong or exaggerated amounts look unprofessional and can put people off
  - A more detailed budget and an updated financing plan will be asked once your written proposal has passed the first “contact” phase.