Innovation is essential for giving factual viewers the goosebumps

Co-production is not enough to ensure high quality factual programming, concluded leading commissioners at Saturday’s MIPDoc Keynote Superset. To break through you need innovative ideas for content and marketing, they said. Big Pacific, a MIPDoc World Premiere TV Screening from New Zealand’s NHNZ went for innovation. “We tried to find the unexpected,” said NHNZ managing director Kyle Murdoch. “So we made a really innovative sizzle reel and sent it to our co-production partners. We didn’t tell them it was a doc about the Pacific. We just asked them what they thought.”

“It gave me goosebumps,” said Ralf Rueckauer, vice president ZDF factual, one of Murdoch’s many co-production partners. “Excellent pictures, extraordinary music. I see hundreds of sizzle reels every year. This one really was outstanding.”

“We need our shows to look like they were made to meet audience expectations,” said Jens Monath, commissioning editor of Terrax ZDF, “and we need a log line that works in three sentences.” Helen Ganichaud, deputy head of ARTE France, encourages producers to be ambitious and think big. Like her, Yuan Tian, head of international co-production at China’s CCTV9 channel, looks for shows that domestic audiences can relate to. “We learn from our partners and other platforms,” she said, “as when we did a series with Kyle called The End Of The Wild. Sending a famous basketball player to Africa was a good way to help Chinese viewers understand what is happening there.”

“Co-production is important to us because it really helps us stretch our dollars,” said Pamela Aguilar, senior director of programming and development, PBS. “We don’t have ton of money to market our shows, but our network of local stations helps us reach a huge audience.”

Warrior Women wins International Pitch

THIS year’s MIPDoc International Pitch was won by Warrior Women, a three-part documentary about female soldiers across the ages. Executive producers Sebastian Pelter and Richard Melman of UK production company Urban Canyons impressed the judges by portraying the lives of female warriors, from the fifth century BC to today, using exhaustive research to bring them to life through re-enactment and CGI.

“The quality of the re-enactment is very high, especially for the available budget, and it’s backed up by rigorous research and on-screen interviews,” said juror Kristina Hollstein, director acquisitions and co-productions, documentary, ZDF. “This is history that has never been told before, and it will be very watchable.”

Warrior Women was one of five programmes shortlisted for their creativity, originality, storytelling, production values and global appeal. Also shortlisted were two other historical studies that use re-enactment. Secret Societies: The Struggle For Power by Arcadia Content (Canada) examines closed groups, ancient and modern, while Slavery Routes from CPB Films (France) focuses on recent scholarly research to find a new angle on slavery and its impact on modern economies. The final two pitches focused on more contemporary topics: Dark Business - Child Trafficking In The Heart Of Europe from Medienkontor (Germany), uncovers modern day slavery in the West and traces its routes. Finally, Trophy Hunters from Alleycats (UK) examines today’s big game hunters, and challenges their argument that the revenue from hunting is funding conservation in ways that liberals never could. Hollstein’s fellow jurors were Paul Hardy, creative director international development, A+E Networks; Justina Hemper, manager factuel acquisitions, eOne TV International; and Ben Nguyen, channel manager, SBS Corp, Australia.