

Media opportunities are burgeoning as digital TV and radio expands but the fastest growing sector is interactive media which has a growing number of employees from small companies, says [VIRGINIA MATTHEWS](#)

It's an interactive world in the media

A job as lead presenter for a flagship BBC or Channel 4 news programme would, for many would-be TV stars, combine both glamour and gravitas, but the chances of becoming the next Fiona Bruce or Jon Snow remain very slim indeed.

Fierce competition

Broadcasting is a relatively small world. It employs no more than 200,000 researchers, presenters, producers, engineers and designers, of whom a full quarter are on freelance contracts. Although competition for a front-of-camera job in the "meeja" remains predictably fierce, there are stark shortages of personnel in the fields of TV script editing and in management roles such as rights management or broadcasting compliance work.

Although it is unlikely that a TV accountant, say – another role where there are vacancies – will ever switch to a more "creative" role in programme-making, for many people, it is far better to be doing a backroom job in a glamorous sector than a frontline job in something more mundane.

While the small-screen world was once fairly simple – three terrestrial channels transmitting programmes that were largely made in-house – TV is now an enormously diverse industry offering a wide range of specialist jobs from animation, graphics, editing and lighting to the creation and production of websites, commercials and TV shows. Around 25 per cent of BBC programmes are made by independent firms where a foot-in-the-door can be invaluable.

Interactive media industry

While the backroom boys and girls of today's increasingly internet-oriented television world are less well known to the public than the likes of Sir Trevor McDonald or Anna Ford, traditional



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programme making and frontline presenting is nowadays only a tiny part of the broadcasting story.

In terms of sheer size, it is what is known as the interactive media industry (where consumers or viewers do more than sit back and watch a box), which

'Most broadcast employers are found in the small or medium enterprise sector'

employs the most people in a variety of content-oriented or technical roles. Traditional TV and radio organisations nowadays come second and third in terms of the numbers they employ.

Far from being dominated by big household names such as the BBC or ITV plc – formed earlier this year following the merger between the two ITV giants Carlton and Granada – most broadcast employers are concentrated in the small or medium enterprise sector; employing between 20

and 25 people. Of the 46,000 people employed in interactive media, 15,000 are in web design, 8,000 are in computer games and 23,000 are involved in CD or other media production. Rather than being a stand-alone industry, the unstoppable growth of interactive media impinges on all other forms of broadcasting.

Interactive future

The BBC for example uses interactive media when it invites viewers to "press the red button" for digital access, or when it stages "live" competitions or votes, while the big-screen film industry is experimenting with the use of interactive media to offer innovations such as alternative storylines on DVDs. There is a similar move in the world of TV commercials.

Interactive is very much seen as the future for all broadcasting – offering viewers more choice and countering the negative "couch potato" reputation of television and film. The development of

broadband and digital technology has significantly increased the ability of interactive media to reach niche, target audiences via the internet or mobile phones, but it can also draw in mass market audiences through more traditional methods of broadcasting.

In traditional circles, the big divide is between the broadcasters who transmit programmes and the programme-makers themselves. Transmission to viewers is via three platforms – terrestrial, satellite and cable – while the newly expanding world of digital broadcasting is making inroads in all three. New media, including interactive technology, is making a contribution throughout the broadcasting

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sector; adding extras such as websites and interactivity features to both mainstream and minority programmes.

While the publicly-funded BBC employs around 26,000 alone and ITV employs 5500, it is worth noting that there are also 21 local terrestrial TV stations – given a licence for up to four years – where work experience opportunities may be more plentiful.

Radio too is a burgeoning broadcast medium, with over 500 services on offer. They range from the five national and 38 local stations run by the BBC – not to mention World Service – and commercial stations such as Capital Radio. In addition, there are over 2,000 not-for-profit, community radio stations now and hundreds more to come in the future.

Multi-skilling

As with TV, opportunities for work experience in radio may be far easier to secure outside the realms of the BBC. Many radio broadcasting "names" cut their teeth on little-known student or hospital radio services before moving into the big league. While "multi-skilling" has made some impact in all areas of broadcasting – BBC journalists for example are expected to be able to switch from radio to TV without turning a hair, this trend is no more true than in radio, where staff are expected not only to generate their own ideas, but to research, edit and present their programmes too.

Although some 66 per cent of the broadcasting workforce are graduates – compared with 16 per cent of the UK workforce as a whole – having a degree is by no means essential. According to Roger Hammett, head of BBC recruitment communications: "Employers see degree qualifications as irrelevant,



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except in a few areas such as research and development and engineering. A passion, an interest and proven experience are far more vital."

While the number of media studies or journalism degree courses continues to mushroom – among the options are an MSc in computer games technology at Liverpool John Moores University and an MA in Feature Film (correct) at Goldsmiths College – broadcasting still welcomes the enthusiastic school leaver

Non-graduate jobs

Among the jobs on offer to non-graduates is that of "runner" – the person who fetches and carries for anyone in the production department of a film, TV or video company and in the process, gets to know the business backwards. Being a runner – whose role may include transcribing production tapes, setting up a location for a shoot and of course making the tea – is still seen as the entry level job in the production side of the business and can lead neatly to a job in practically any area of broadcasting.

Broadcast journalists

A broadcast journalist or BJ on the other hand is more likely to be a graduate who is focused squarely on programme making or news as a career. Typical jobs include monitoring newswires for breaking stories, researching items, conducting interviews, preparing scripts, giving technical directions and, as ever, coming up with snappy, original ideas.

Like a newspaper journalist, a BJ is expected to be a rapid thinker who gets quickly to the heart of a complex story, an excellent communicator with an affinity for his or her audience and an individual who thrives on tight deadlines and even job insecurity. TV is a fickle, fashion-led world where a job for life has probably never existed outside the once-paternalistic confines of the BBC.

Graduate training schemes are rare in broadcasting, but most of the big players do have opportunities for both graduate and non-graduate entrants with ambition and flair. They include the BBC, Channel 4, BSKyB, Film & Television Freelance Training and the Production Guild.