



# *Careers in Television*

National Association of Broadcasters





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Note: The educational background and work experience required for the various careers discussed in this booklet are generalizations. Specific educational backgrounds and work skills will vary from station to station, market by market.

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# *Careers in Television*

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**I**n less than 40 years, television has gone from a curious ■ luxury to commonplace necessity in nearly every home in America. TV entertains, informs, and educates. The performers who appear on its colorful and dynamic screens have become extended families for those who watch. For many, they are the subject of fascination and envy.

Yet for every performer we watch on the air, there are hundreds of workers whose less glamorous labors make that show possible. They include members of professions found in all large commercial enterprises—managers, accountants, sales representatives, secretaries, receptionists—as well as some rarely found outside of television—videocamera operators, engineers, traffic supervisors. Their earnings range from the wages earned for similar work to the stratospheric salaries commanded by a tiny percentage of on-air performers and behind-the-scenes top executives.

Is there a place for you in the television industry? This booklet is designed to help you answer that question by acquainting you with the specific types of jobs found in large and small broadcasting outlets across the country. Accompanying the job descriptions are their educational requirements and a general picture of the competition for each position.

Because a life in television can be so very rewarding—both financially and in terms of contributions an individual can make

to our society—TV can be tough to break into. But like the U.S. Marines, TV managers are always looking for a few good people. They are particularly interested in people with imagination, drive, and flexibility; people who prize accuracy and cope well with pressure and long hours, who enjoy unexpected challenges and don't mind moving to another city. TV can always use those few good people who, by mastering increasingly complex technology (and understanding our diverse population), can help meet the demands of the sophisticated American audience.

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U.S. television operations vary in size as well as vary in composition and job titles. One station's "engineering technician" might be another's "operating engineer" or a third's "grip." At smaller stations a single employee may have the responsibilities handled by two or three people at a large station.

In addition, the television industry today is a highly diversified field. Once, the networks produced their own entertainment; today there are literally hundreds of independent production companies, located mainly in Hollywood and New York, that create and produce shows for sale to the networks, broadcasting groups, or individual stations. The U.S. government and private industry also produce informational and training programs that provide work for people with television training and skills. And, of course, public access and cable TV producers need people with the same knowledge and experience.

The descriptions that follow are broad enough so that they generally apply to jobs within commercial and public broadcasting as well as to those in other industries. The titles may vary, but the jobs that need to be done generally stay the same.

Most of the functions described below are also found at the national television networks. Most networks jobs are in New York or Hollywood. The shows are more elaborate and expensive and thus require more experienced employees and free lancers.

Typically, commercial and public broadcasting stations have five divisions of activity—programming, news, engineering, sales, and general administration.

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# *Programming*

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**A**lmost all stations—affiliated or independent—conceive and produce a variety of local shows. These include local news, interviews, sports, children's, religious, and public affairs shows.

The planning and production of programs broadcast by a television station takes place in the programming department. This department also determines which shows produced independently will be acquired by the station.

Many commercial television stations are associated with one of the three national television networks (ABC, CBS, and NBC), or the public television network (PBS). These local stations are considered the network's affiliates, and have contractual agreements with the network. In return for agreeing to carry the network's programs, the affiliate receives a share of the network's advertising revenues. The network bases its advertising rates on how many viewers it can offer an advertiser. Independent stations develop or purchase all of the programs that run on the station.

Some large group owners also develop programs for their stations and for sale to other stations.

The **PROGRAM DIRECTOR** is the decision-maker and overseer of the program department. In collaboration with the general manager (who is responsible for the entire station operation) and the sales manager (in charge of sales of advertising time), the program director determines and directs the station's policies and plans the most effective programming schedule for



the station. On a daily basis, the program director must consider: What does the competition have to offer? Which shows will best compete in a particular time slot? Who should be assigned to produce these shows? How much should be budgeted? How should the available equipment and manpower be allocated?

The program director must be aware of the station's compliance with all Federal Communications Commission (FCC) rules and regulations relating to programming.\*

Many program directors acquire their experience by performing a number of jobs described on the following pages. Quite a few are former directors or performers. All must have demonstrated ability for supervision and leadership, and have a thorough understanding of sales, production, and programming. And, as the person charged with evaluating both network or independent programming and local program concepts, the program director must have sound judgment and good taste—not to mention calmness under pressure.

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\*The FCC is an independent federal agency headed by five commissioners who are appointed by the president and approved by the Senate. It licenses radio and TV stations to operate "in the public interest, convenience, and necessity," and assigns to stations their specific frequencies and power. The FCC also assigns call letters, processes transfers of ownership, monitors station operations for compliance with its rules and regulations, and, at license renewal time, reviews a broadcaster's record. In addition, the FCC licenses certain broadcast technicians.

As is the case for most top-level managers, a college degree is practically a requirement for program directors. Useful majors include communications, telecommunications, radio-TV, journalism, business administration, or marketing.

Working with (or sometimes reporting to) the program director is the **PRODUCTION MANAGER**, who handles on a daily basis the myriad of details that go into producing the station's entire range of programs. The production manager juggles personnel, space and equipment requirements, and is responsible for program conception, design and development, and production scheduling. Often the production manager supervises producers, directors, art directors, camera operators, floor managers, and a host of supporting players. (In news operations, some of these details are handled by **ASSIGNMENT EDITORS**, see page 13.)

Like the program director, the production manager must enjoy sorting out details, and have leadership ability as well as creative flair. Most production managers have had substantial experience in less encompassing production positions. Competition for these positions is strong—production managers may be among the more highly-paid station employees (though their salaries don't begin to compete with those commanded by top performers and senior executives), and their prospects for even greater responsibility and reward are quite good. A college degree is common; radio-TV, communications, theatre or journalism degrees are preferred.



Often the production manager has graduated from the ranks of **PRODUCER** (or **PRODUCER-DIRECTOR**). The producer's work is similar to the production manager's. But while the production manager supervises an entire station's output, the producer plans and oversees a single show or a series of shows. The producer's job includes everything from selecting material and performers (and in the case of producer-director, directing the rehearsals and performance), to planning sets, lights, props, and camera angles. A producer for news programs also routinely selects film to accompany the news, scripts, and music. The producer sees to it that all of the elements of a show can be paid for within the operating budget. At larger stations, or at independent studios that produce series of shows for network or independent broadcasting, the producer also chooses directors and handles contracts with performers and other freelance technicians, musicians, and costume or makeup artists required by a show.

The educational requirements for producer are similar to those for production managers. Many producers are promoted from the ranks of directors or associate producers who have already worked as floor managers and production assistants. Competition for this very responsible and highly autonomous position is heavy.

Assisting the producers—and able to take charge in their absence—are **ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS**. They perform the same tasks as producers and, on a large series, are a major source of creative planning as well. Story lines and concepts, design, and production of special segments may become the associate producer's responsibility.

Some of the large stations and most of the independent producing companies also employ **DIRECTORS** who report to the producers. The director, in addition to coordinating the fine details of a production, actually gives instructions to all of those involved in the show: performers, production staff, and technical crew including the camera operators.

These instructions may be as specific as plotting camera angles or choosing and approving the performers. Often directors depend on **ASSISTANT DIRECTORS** to help them stay on top of their responsibilities.

A director, like nearly all of the professionals described above, needs a combination of creativity, technical knowledge, organizational skills, and the ability to motivate.



Working on a production are a variety of assistants that may include for a network or syndicated program a **UNIT MANAGER**, who oversees the logistics and budget expenditures of a production or series, especially when filming takes place "on location" outside the studio. Also involved in most entertainment and news programs is the **FLOOR MANAGER**, who coordinates and relays instructions from the director to the crew and performers and sees to it that all sets and props are in good working order. The floor manager also follows along with the script and cues performers.

Both the unit manager and the floor manager need at minimum a high school diploma; for those with ambitions beyond these jobs some college education is preferred. Neither of these jobs is available at entry level. A minimum of one or two years of television experience is a prerequisite.

Every department offers its own entry-level positions. Programming, sales, engineering, and administration all employ assistants who may start as "gofers" (literally, one who "goes for" things) and end up with responsible jobs. In the programming department the job for which previous TV experience is often not required is called **PRODUCTION ASSISTANT**.

People with high school diplomas or, preferably, with some college education, and some theater, photography, or film experience, as well as typing skills, serve what amounts to an apprenticeship. A production assistant works with production managers, directors, producers, floor managers, etc., and helps out where needed. In the process, the production assistant will probably be exposed to a wide variety of activities including doing research, writing copy, casting, scheduling of guests, building sets, doing makeup or choosing costumes, placing equipment, planning, scheduling, and perhaps assisting camera operators or other technicians.

From this position, the production assistant can "try on" various other jobs at a station or in a production company. When the timing is right, promotion to assistant director, associate producer, or perhaps a camera or videotape assistant is a logical progression.

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# News

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**W**hile the type of entertainment broadcast by a TV station contributes to its identity, another element that defines that station's personality for viewers is its news operation. At some smaller stations, the news may be handled by the program department. At medium and large stations and the networks, this function is the responsibility of the news department.

The **NEWS DIRECTOR** heads up that department. Like the program director, the news director finds that the job offers a great deal of pressure and excitement along with the responsibility. The news director is the final authority for the choice of all news, interviews, documentaries, and special news feature programs and also supervises anywhere from five to 40-plus reporters, anchorpersons, sportscasters, weather reporters, news writers, freelance performers, film and videocamera operators, researchers, assistants and secretaries.

Besides overseeing the budget, coordinating with other departments, and monitoring the work of the reporting staff, the news director must have a particular skill—news judgement. This skill, often developed through years of print and/or electronic (TV or radio) news experience, is used daily as the news director judges the relative importance of a particular news story and decides on the appropriate degree of coverage.

Promotion to news director is generally the pinnacle of a long career in TV news. News directors often worked previously as on-air reporters, news writers, and producer-directors. A top-rated news show is usually profitable for its station. Consequently



a climate of intense competition has developed among competing news programs. Stations are constantly searching for fresh, exciting, and different ways of presenting the news and attracting viewers. The news director generally takes direct credit—or blame—for the success or failure of the news operation. Because of the high pressure and responsibility, news directors often make excellent salaries but the position also has a high turnover rate.

The more obvious stars of the news director's staff are the on-air performers, many of whom belong to the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) or the Writers Guild of America (WGA). The top performers are the **NEWS ANCHORS**. These are the personalities most familiar to viewers and who play the largest visible role in setting the tone for the station. The competition for an anchor job is intense—and the financial rewards are among the highest in the industry.

Once news anchors were simply readers of news. Today with "instant news" technology, they must be seasoned news people who can interview, coordinate live reports from a number of sources while on camera, and write and develop news stories. Most anchors started as reporters and, like other top broadcasting employees, have acquired the experience necessary to get to the top.

In small and medium-sized markets, an anchor generally also serves as a reporter, gathering news, researching and writing reports, and helping to edit taped segments. Anchors may host an interview program or other shows. In the larger markets, most anchors have a hand in writing the material that is read on the air.

A TV anchor is also an entertainer. What looks like an easy job actually requires a number of highly developed skills. An

anchor must learn to speak in a pleasing yet authoritative manner. Anchors must be able to ad lib on the air, understand the significance of the events that are being reported, and maintain a posture that is attractive to the camera.

With the intense competition for on-air jobs, those hoping to become news anchors should definitely have a college or even a graduate school degree, with a major in journalism, mass communications, or political science as well as courses in drama and speech. Along with the degree or degrees, an aspiring anchor should try to become well educated in as many areas as possible.

Working alongside the news anchor, both on air and off, are the **REPORTERS**. These on-air performers need all of the attributes of a news anchor, but for the reporter certain skills will be used more often. Reporters must gather news from a variety of sources, determine, with the news director or assignment editor, the scope and length of the story, and write and deliver the story on the air. In smaller stations the reporter may also do some of the production work involved in producing that news segment. At larger stations, the reporter may be a specialist in covering a specific beat: politics, consumer news, farm news, health, business. At the largest stations, the reporter's tasks are subdivided among reporters, news writers and researchers.

Reporters also face intense competition, partly because their jobs give them public exposure and command good salaries, and partly because they are in line for anchor positions or behind-the-scenes news director jobs.

Among the specialities that reporters can develop are weather and sports news. The **WEATHER REPORTER** at smaller stations may be a high school graduate who reads the latest statistics as reported by the National Weather Service. At larger stations, the weather reporter is a trained meteorologist, equipped with the latest in weather prediction technology, and master of a range of visual devices that illustrate weather conditions for the viewers, from satellite photographs to radarscopes. Because few stations employ more than one or two weather reporters, prospects for employment in this field are limited.

**SPORTSCASTERS** also compete for a limited number of positions, although their prospects are better than weather reporters'. At small stations, sports may be a one person department and the sportscaster may report to the news director. Consequently the sportscaster not only reports the outcome of local games and contests, but reviews, selects, and reports on the films and

videotapes of sporting events and news of national interest. Sportscasters may provide play-by-play descriptions of live events, interview sports figures, and create features and documentaries aired before and after major sporting events.

At larger stations, these duties are divided among members of a sports department, led by the **SPORTS DIRECTOR**. The duties resemble those of news directors. A team of sportscasters may be assigned individual sports to cover. A staff of writers, researchers, producers, and assistants provide the background, ideas, and production elements.

Due in part to increased competition for these jobs, some sportscasters—and weathercasters—have injected humor, fun and catchy “gimmicks” into their respective on-air and field reporting styles. Audiences are growing to expect sportscasters and weathercasters to project a lively and fun-loving image.

Most sportscasters have an undergraduate degree in journalism or mass communications, a range of liberal arts courses, and an extensive knowledge of (and often training in) a variety of sports. The financial rewards range from mediocre to stratospheric. Many sportscasters stay in the field for life, but their careers often take them from news or sport writing positions to sportscasting both locally and eventually perhaps as part of a network sports team, to sports directing.





In larger markets, news teams often include a number of other specialists who perform on a freelance basis, including **MOVIE REVIEWERS**, **CONSUMER REPORTERS**, and **COMMENTATORS**. These specialists must not only be thoroughly educated in their field (and in the case of commentators, many fields with particular emphasis on politics and current events), they, too, must have the talent and appearance to present themselves well on camera. Freelance performers are not given the same employment benefits and job security that accompany staff positions. However, experience gained through freelance employment offers one of the few avenues of entry into the professional staff jobs. This holds true for all broadcast positions. As an alternative to working your way up from the bottom, freelancing can provide both the access to those who hire and the experience necessary to secure a job in television.

The **STAFF ANNOUNCER**'s voice is heard daily as the TV screen shows the station's identification, public service information, or the end of a commercial message. In the early days of TV, the staff announcer sat off camera in a booth and spoke at scheduled intervals during the broadcast day. But today, with the changes in technology, announcers often tape their segments. Many top announcers work on a freelance basis for a variety of stations and advertising agencies. Announcers who are employed fulltime by a station generally also serve as hosts for public af-

fairs and children's programs, and occasionally fill in for absent reporters. Because of these trends, announcer's jobs, once considered the first step leading to anchor positions, have diminished in number.

Typically, announcers receive their training in high school or college dramatics, and many learn to use their voices expressively and entertainingly in radio.

Performers are not the only stars of the news director's staff; in this department are also found **NEWS WRITERS**, **DESK ASSISTANTS**, and one or more **ASSISTANT NEWS DIRECTORS** and **ASSIGNMENT EDITORS**.

The duties of **ASSISTANT NEWS DIRECTORS** and **ASSIGNMENT EDITORS** are often similar. They carry out many of the directions of the news director. Assistant news directors also monitor police and fire department radio bands, take calls from people with news tips, and assign reporters, news writers and often the camera crews to cover both prescheduled events and breaking news stories. They arrange work shifts and other assignments. In addition, assistant news directors serve as part of the quality control effort of the station. They watch for mistakes and misinterpretations, evaluate finished stories, and judge the significance of news events.

An assistant news director or assignment editor typically served as a reporter before moving up and is in line for the job of news director. Some stations recruit assistant news directors from newspapers, where the skills of editing and news judgment are developed. Like most broadcasting jobs, assistant news directing is highly pressured, and carries with it significant responsibility and power. Excellent organizational skills are essential; so is good judgment and taste.

Before becoming on-air reporters, many of today's TV personalities worked as **NEWS WRITERS**. The news writer not only writes and edits news stories (sometimes in conjunction with the reporter who will deliver it), but also writes commentaries, introductions, descriptions, transitions for station breaks, and other words that the viewer will hear as part of a news broadcast. News writers do not write commercials.

The news writer needs the best journalistic skills: a crisp and concise writing style, the ability to generate and track down information, and a broad background in news to help judge the newsworthiness and accuracy of a story. A person who has ac-

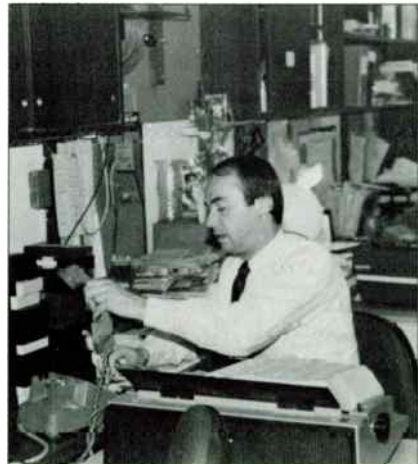
quired these skills in college—as a journalism/mass communications major, or perhaps as a staffer on the college TV or radio station or newspaper—may be considered for the job of news writer even without broadcast experience. Many, however, are promoted from desk assistant.

The **DESK ASSISTANT**, like the production assistant, is the helper and “gofer” of the news department and will probably answer telephones, deliver supplies, log videotape and film as it comes from camera operators on its way to editors, and generally be on call as needed. Desk assistants often acquire experience in information collection, research, and dealing with the public. The assistant will also be called on to type a variety of materials. At large stations, desk assistants often work night shifts or part-time hours.

Desk assistants are found at the medium and large market stations, and because people in these jobs have excellent opportunities for advancement, the competition for them is quite strong.

Two other members of the station staff perform services that are extremely important to the life and image of the TV station: the **PROMOTION DIRECTOR** and the **COMMUNITY RELATIONS DIRECTOR**.

They are described here together because at some smaller stations their jobs are combined into one. At some stations these positions report to the program director. The promotion director is a public relations professional whose responsibility is to promote the station’s image, programs, and activities. Among







their many duties, the promotion directors conceive and execute a variety of written and taped presentations, secure advertising in other media, and, in conjunction with the sales department (which sells time to advertisers for commercial messages), develop ways to keep current advertisers and attract new ones.

At public TV stations, where commercial time is not for sale and the station is supported by government and private grants and gifts, the promotion director assists in fundraising plans and activities.

At smaller stations, the promotion director may handle the tasks facing a larger station's **COMMUNITY RELATIONS DIRECTOR**. The community relations director plans, coordinates, and executes a station's services and programs that are meant to respond to the needs of the local community. These include public service announcements (PSAs), public affairs programming (often undertaken in coordination with the news department), and special events that deal with community-oriented issues.

People interested in promotion jobs should prepare themselves by studying public relations, advertising, or communications. In addition, experience in print design and sales is very useful. Only the most experienced should consider applying to be director of promotion; but many large stations, as well as networks and independent producers, have a promotion staff with complementary skills in graphics, editing and marketing services.

In addition to the above-mentioned background, a community relations director must demonstrate an orientation toward public service. Many community relations directors come to their jobs after serving as director of a local service or civic group. Because some community relations directors also serve as host for community-issues talk shows, they must also have the skills of other on-air personalities: poise, attractive appearance, and an ability to speak well.

Today a substantial number of stations employ **EDITORIAL DIRECTORS** who write and deliver the station's editorial comments—that is, opinions expressed by the management and owners of the station. Often the editorial director performs much of the community liaison work that falls under the responsibility of other stations' community relations directors.

Because television is a visual medium, great care is given to the look of what is transmitted to your home screen. While much of this look is the result of documentary or dramatic film or videotape footage, there are countless other elements that contribute as well. These come under the domain of the **ART DIRECTOR** who is responsible for the design of all programs produced by the station.

The art director at a smaller station is probably also in charge of all printed materials distributed by that station. So the art director must have wide-ranging experience in set design, animation, cartooning, illustration, graphics, layout, and videotape. The larger station's art director supervises **GRAPHIC ARTISTS**, administers the department's budget, makes personnel assignments, and coordinates supplies.

A typical art director brings to the job experience in television production work, a degree in commercial art, fine art, or design, and experience in journalism.

The **GRAPHIC ARTIST** in television not only works on two-dimensional design projects, but often designs and constructs sets and props for TV productions. Generally, only the larger stations employ graphic artists and the position can be particularly satisfying for creative people because so many different styles and media come into play, from paste-up and cartooning to realistic backdrops and sculpted props.

The work of the foregoing broadcasters has no reality for the TV audience without transmission. The process of transmitting the television picture begins at the camera and ends with the antenna. Dozens of professionals make this happen.

The men and women behind the studio cameras today may be called **CINEMATOGRAPHERS** or **CAMERA OPERATORS**. Those who operate the portable Electronic News Gathering (ENG) cameras are called **ENG OPERATORS**. Originally, television relied exclusively on the use of film—which required time consuming photographic developing and processing before it would be available for transmission. Those who operated the cameras, edited the finished product, and directed the placement of lights and composition of a shot, were known as cinematographers, a name taken from their movie industry counterparts.

Today, with videotape technology and the use of portable ENG cameras, film is becoming obsolete. At some stations, film is still used for projects that do not involve fast-breaking news—like commercials or special programs, for example. But most have come to rely on video technology using videotapes that may be played back immediately without chemical processing.

ENG operators work alongside news reporters to capture interviews and events on tape. Often they rush the tape back to the studio where they serve as tape editors. When on location, the ENG operator is directed by the reporter or producer of the news segment. In cooperation with a producer and a reporter, the ENG operator assembles the finished product. This job requires a creative flair and ability to work well in groups as well as technical knowledge. Camera and ENG operators also need to be aware of the look and feel of a camera shot and of the best, most creative way to position a camera.

The camera operators run the video camera during the rehearsals and the broadcast of a studio-based TV program. They use a studio TV camera mounted on tripods or dollies. Typically, in the studio, a camera operator takes direction from the director through an intercom system attached to a headset.

At many stations, the camera or ENG operator positions and **ASSISTANT CAMERA OPERATOR** jobs are considered entry level. Aspiring camera operators need a high school diploma and some training in photography (still or motion) or audio-visual equipment. Some stations consider camera and ENG operators members of the production team who may move on into studio floor managing, producing, or directing. At other stations, the camera or ENG operator is part of the engineering department. In that case, an operator may decide to aim for the job of audio-visual engineer or technical director.

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# Engineering

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**T**he divisions among types of television engineers are not as clear as those dividing the responsibilities of the news and programming departments. In part, this is because many broadcast outlets around the country are unionized. A number of unions are generally represented in the engineering department. Unions influence the definition of positions differently in each station, but the non-union shop may be completely different. The largest engineering unions are the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians AFL-CIO (NABET) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). Where one union contract may require a worker to master the skills of other technicians, another may prohibit engineers from working outside their specialties.

Compensation in the engineering jobs tend to vary with demand; in recent years, stations have been in great need of engineers and technicians. With the frantic pace of technical change in the broadcast industry, the flexible, creative engineer or technician should be able to benefit by riding the wave of the technological future and practically name their city and job.

Engineering departments—six to fifty or more who handle all of a station's technical facilities, equipment, and services—are headed by the **CHIEF ENGINEER** or **DIRECTOR OF ENGINEERING**. This manager not only must possess thorough experience in all of the technical aspects of broadcasting; but must also thoroughly understand the principles of electronics—both on paper and in the operating equipment. A major task of the



chief engineer is to be able to design technical systems to meet the specific and changing needs of the station's particular requirements. And because the chief engineer prepares technical applications, including FCC construction permits and licenses, a good layman's understanding of communications law is required. An FCC license is also desirable along with some form of technical certification.

The job of chief engineer is generally equivalent to the program director's in terms of experience, responsibility, and pressure. The position generally caps a long career in television engineering. While some chief engineers began as engineering technicians straight out of high school or technical school, most also have electrical engineering, physics, or science degrees and technical training from a technical center.

Number two in the engineering department is the **ASSISTANT CHIEF ENGINEER**, who handles the day-to-day operations and scheduling. Besides performing many of the same functions as the chief engineer, the assistant also helps develop technical designs and specifications and must be able to create the documentation necessary to put these designs into practice. Assistant chief engineers help install equipment, conduct transmission tests, and generally fill in for other technicians as needed.

The education and experience requirements are virtually the same as for the chief engineer, including the FCC license and

technical certification. Assistant chief engineers are frequently chosen on the premise that they have the qualifications necessary for stepping into a chief engineer's position.

At smaller stations, the assistant chief engineer also performs the work of **ENGINEERING SUPERVISOR**. At the larger stations, the engineering supervisors direct the work of **AUDIO, VIDEO, MAINTENANCE, MASTER CONTROL, TRANSMITTER, and VIDEOTAPE ENGINEERS**. This supervisor ensures the proper maintenance and operation of electronic equipment. By overseeing the work of five or more engineers, the engineering supervisor is responsible for equipment tests and calibration designed to ensure that the station produces the highest quality sound and picture and meets FCC regulations. The supervisor is constantly on the alert for equipment malfunction or failure, directs repairs and keeps records of all technical problems.

Most engineering supervisors have had a minimum of two years experience as one of the above listed engineers. Most also received technical school training. Some have college degrees in engineering or physics, and most also have an FCC license and technical certification. As the engineers directly in line for chief engineer or assistant chief engineer positions, these managers have good prospects for upward mobility at their stations or in a larger market city.

Technically part of the engineering staff, but working directly with both engineering and programming employees, is the **TECHNICAL DIRECTOR**. Technical directors oversee the technical quality of a program and operate the production switcher, which controls the choice of camera images and special



effects being fed into the videotape recorder and over the air. During the planning of a production, the technical director analyzes the requirements of the production and makes recommendations to the director on how technically to meet those requirements. During rehearsal and performance, the technical director sits with the director in the control room and runs the switcher, turning the director's camera and videotape choices into reality.

Like the engineering supervisor, most technical directors are promoted from the ranks of the station's engineers after two or more years of experience. They must have an all-encompassing understanding of the technical workings of broadcasting, as well as the ability to handle stress while making sound decisions. Technical directors who choose to move on in TV often become **ENGINEERING SUPERVISORS**.

As television becomes more complex technologically, the engineering staff takes on greater importance. Much in demand are **MAINTENANCE ENGINEERS**, who perform the actual preventive maintenance on cameras, switchers, audio consoles, video monitors, microphones, videotape recorders, and other equipment. They generally work in an engineering shop located at the station and are on call for emergency work.

Qualifications for maintenance engineering include a high school diploma, training in electronics at a vocational or technical school, and a minimum of one year of TV maintenance experience that includes familiarity with engineering test equipment and the ability to read schematic diagrams. In addition, an FCC license and technical certification are desirable.

The **TRANSMITTER ENGINEER** maintains the TV transmitter and antenna system in compliance with FCC regulations. The transmitter engineer's daily duties include testing the performance of the transmitter, making technical adjustments necessary to ensure uninterrupted broadcasting, conducting tests and keeping records of operations as required by the chief engineer, and routinely inspecting the transmitter tower and building. A transmitter engineer needs much of the same training as maintenance engineers and an FCC license and technical certification.

**AUDIO ENGINEERS** are in charge of the electronic controls that comprise that station's audio and video equipment. This includes placing microphones, producing special sound effects,

and monitoring sound levels. During the program's editing process, they may also add musical or other sound elements to the tape. The audio engineer bears final responsibility for the technical quality of the program's sound.

The video portion of a program falls under the **VIDEO ENGINEER's** domain. The video engineer's job is to set up and align the cameras, control brightness and color levels, monitor transmission quality, as well as create special visual effects.

At some stations, the audio and visual responsibilities are divided between two specialists; at others, an **AUDIO-VIDEO ENGINEER** handles both. In any event, most stations require those specialists to be able to handle both the audio and video portions. Like the other engineers already discussed, audio-video engineers are in demand. Their previous experience should include the education and training mentioned above for transmitter and maintenance engineers; in addition, a successful audio-video engineer has quick reflexes, skill in operating equipment, and a sensitive ear. At minimum, an FCC license is required along with technical certification.

The **MASTER CONTROL ENGINEER** operates at the heart of the TV station. This job involves coordinating the video and audio portions of programming that come from the studio, the networks, pre-recorded segments, satellites, ENG crews, and any other sources and then delivering the signals via the master control switcher and processing equipment to the transmitter. The master control engineer cues and rolls film and videotape, ensuring smooth transitions from program to commercial to station break. Other responsibilities may also include maintaining the station log and ensuring that the station's output meets FCC technical requirements.

Besides having the training and background of audio-video engineers, the master control engineer must be particularly calm under pressure, alert, capable of making decisions quickly, and possess a good knowledge of the workings of wide variety of audio and video equipment. The market for these engineers is also quite good.

Finally, at this same level of employment is the **VIDEOTAPE ENGINEER** who sets up and operates a wide variety of videotape machines that record, play back, and edit programs. The videotape engineer evaluates videotapes, including satellite feeds received by the station, duplicates the taped material, and



assembles tape segments for broadcast. The videotape engineer also monitors the audio and visual quality of videotape recordings and works with the master control engineer and other audio-video engineers.

Videotape engineers generally spend time as engineering assistants or technicians before being promoted to the position. An FCC license and other technical certification are desirable.

The entry-level job on the engineering ladder is usually called **ENGINEERING ASSISTANT** or **TECHNICIAN**. Armed with high school diploma and some vocational training, a person with interest and ability in electronics and broadcast equipment operation and repair faces less competition for this position. Engineering technicians handle the set-up, operation, maintenance, and construction of technical equipment and facilities. The job will involve working on just about every piece of equipment the station owns including slide and film projectors, cameras, microphones, video and audio tape recorders, audio switchers and mixers, video switchers and special effects systems, transmission equipment, testing devices, portable or remote equipment and lighting equipment. Opportunities for advancement are generally limited only by the technician's own capabilities—and perhaps timing. To be particularly attractive to an employer, a candidate should have an FCC license and be preparing for technical certification.

A word about technical certification which is mentioned frequently as an engineering prerequisite. The FCC no longer conducts examinations for broadcast engineers and a license is needed only for transmitter operations and maintenance. Technical certification replaces the license examination and is conducted by several membership organizations such as the Society of Broadcast Engineers. The certification tests are specifically tailored for various areas of broadcast engineering. As a technician becomes more experienced additional certification tests are taken to demonstrate expertise in a variety of broadcast engineering jobs. Certification demonstrates to a potential employer that the applicant is willing to work hard for the job and is interested in improving performance.

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# Sales

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**A** television station is a highly complex collection of workers—and a very expensive one to maintain. Where does the money come from to support a station?

In commercial television that money comes from the advertisers, who buy air time in which to sell their product or service. Advertising is the major source of revenue for a television station.

This revenue comes to a local station directly or indirectly from a variety of sources. Local advertisers supply a portion; regional and national advertisers another part. The networks also compensate their affiliates from advertising revenues earned by network productions carried by the affiliate stations.

When a network broadcasts a show via an affiliate, that show comes with some commercials in place, so to speak, and some blank or empty commercial time segments between programs. The commercials accompanying the show were bought by national advertisers who want to reach a greater audience. The empty spaces are there to be filled by the station affiliate with local commercials, bought by companies whose products or services are probably only available locally or by national advertisers who want to direct their advertising only to selected cities for particular campaigns.

In either case, the time was sold to the advertiser by a member of either the network's or the local station's sales force. The duties of the sales force at either level are quite similar.

The person in charge of producing all advertising revenues for a station or network is called the **GENERAL SALES MANAGER**.

The general sales manager has a proven record in sales over many years as well as long experience in TV sales. The general sales manager analyzes the limited inventory of air time available for commercials and works with the program director and the station's general manager in choosing the programs that they think will attract advertisers. Advertisers are willing to pay higher rates for time accompanying shows that have proven successful in drawing a large audience which the advertiser considers to be potential customers.

The general sales manager supervises the sales staff, develops sales plans and goals, previews programs, and helps establish the station's advertising policies and standards. The general sales manager also must know the local market and the competition well in order to set competitive advertising rates. In addition, the general sales manager must be sensitive to economic factors, taste trends, and merchandising techniques.

The general sales manager is among the more highly compensated management employees who has usually served a long apprenticeship in station sales and can expect some day to be considered for the general manager's job. People interested in climbing the TV sales career ladder should prepare themselves with an undergraduate degree in marketing, advertising, or business administration.

Next in line, the **ASSISTANT SALES MANAGER**, helps the general sales manager with all aspects of sales, and takes care of many of the personnel details. At some stations, two or more assistant sales managers are given responsibility for local or national advertising sales, or perhaps the specialized sale of advertising to accompany news, sports or other special programs.

The assistant sales manager supervises the sales staff on a daily basis, makes sales calls, and takes care of accounts already in hand. In addition, the assistant sales manager analyzes ratings statistics, monitors available air time, keeps files and records of all business, and prepares reports for clients.

The assistant sales manager may work with the station's national sales rep firm—usually located in a major city that serves as the "out of town" sales force—to solicit national advertising. The rep firm may have regional offices in key cities through the United States.

Like the general sales manager, the assistant must have extensive sales experience in television, the ability to understand



complex sales and ratings data, and an enthusiastic, motivating management style.

The **ADVERTISING SALESPEOPLE** or **ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES** are key to the TV station's sales force. They sell advertising time—10-, 30-, or 60-second commercials, partial or full sponsorship of a program—to businesses or advertising agencies acting on behalf of businesses. Advertising salespeople know the station's program schedules, how much time is available, the composition of the audience, and how that audience should relate to the client's product. They then propose a commercial schedule and type of presentation to the client, close the sale, and often assist in the writing and production of commercials for clients who don't employ their own advertising agencies. In addition, salespeople monitor the work of the traffic/continuity supervisor, who schedules all programs and commercials, to ensure that the advertiser gets proper service.

The primary prerequisite of sales jobs is simple—the ability to sell. Of course college degrees in marketing, advertising, or business are very useful. And at least one year of sales experience in retail sales or other media is often required. The job requires persistence and a person who is not easily discouraged. The most successful advertising salespeople like to sell, like to make money, and have a winning appearance and presentation, drive, and imagination.

Another key player in broadcast operations, whose work spans the various departments, is the **TRAFFIC/CONTINUITY**

**SUPERVISOR.** This person schedules every second of air time, and informs the sales department when commercial time becomes available, when it is sold, and how it is scheduled. The traffic/continuity supervisor reports to the general sales manager, the program director, or both. Preparing the daily program schedule of all transmissions is a primary part of the job, but this supervisor also spends time writing for announcers who give the station breaks and announcements promoting the station.

The traffic/continuity supervisor position is the most responsible for those considered entry level. A high school graduate may be considered for this job; one who has experience or course work in broadcasting, advertising, and copy writing is considered most competitive. Numerous opportunities are available for the right person who is alert, bright, extremely detail-oriented and who can operate a computer and/or word processing equipment.

Feeding information to the traffic/continuity supervisor is the **SALES COORDINATOR.** Found at the larger stations, this employee monitors the activities of the sales staff, writes orders, maintains a schedule of available air time, and serves as a general assistant/secretary to the sales staff. The sales coordinator also works with the production staff to schedule production of commercials for the sales clients. Another entry-level job, the sales coordinator position requires candidates with high school diplomas. Training at a secretarial or business school and ability to work with word processors and computers makes the candidate that much more attractive to potential employers. Typically, sales coordinators move into advertising sales jobs.

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# General Administration

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**T**he “front office” of a television station is the general administration department. Overseeing every aspect of station operations is the **GENERAL MANAGER**. As the highest ranking executive, the general manager has the greatest responsibility of any member of the station. In commercial television, the general manager usually arrives at the job via many years of experience as business or sales manager. In public television, the general manager often came from the fundraising side of the station. General managers can also be promoted from the ranks of program director, chief engineer or news director.

In commercial television, the general manager is responsible for the bottom line—the overall revenue-generating ability of the station and must constantly evaluate the effectiveness of all of the other departments in promoting the greatest profitability. In public TV, the general manager must prepare and justify budgets that will be approved and funded by government agencies, and solicit funds from corporations and foundations.

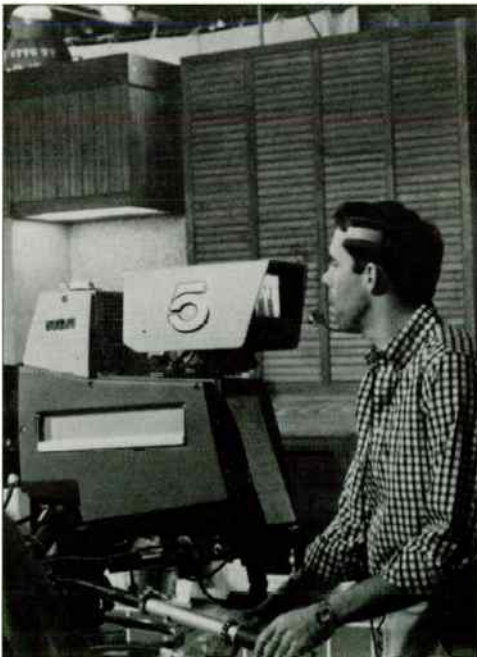
Specifically, general managers hire the major department heads, set goals, monitor performances, and approve budgets.

At the general manager’s right hand is the station’s **BUSINESS MANAGER**. This person handles all financial transactions, develops business plans and goals, and supervises the activities of a business department that generally includes accountants, bookkeepers, billing clerks, and personnel managers.

The rewards for business managers are commensurate with their responsibilities. Business managers tend to have long experience, business administration, accounting, or management degrees (both undergraduate and graduate-level), and very often work their way up to the position from within the station's business department.

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Absent from the above description are a number of jobs that are essential to the TV industry—lawyer, accountant, bookkeeper, secretary, receptionist, researcher. That is because the work of these TV professionals is basically the same as for their counterparts in other industries. Jobs in these areas are available, and like many other TV jobs, can be a stepping stone to more specialized TV employment.



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# *A Word About Education*

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**A**s you've already observed from reading the job descriptions, broadcasting jobs require a minimum of a high school diploma. For most, college or vocational training is preferred. Those aiming for the highest level of broadcast management would be well advised to pursue a graduate degree. Some people who have very successful TV careers never took a single "broadcast" course, but have very strong and broad liberal arts backgrounds. But as the industry has grown, the offerings (and value) of broadcast courses by liberal arts and vocational schools have grown as well.

Of interest to those who want to major in broadcasting at the college level—or those who seek a two-year program at a junior college—is the Broadcast Education Association, an organization of broadcasters and educators. BEA includes more than 300 schools that offer substantial course work in radio and television. Information about the offerings of its member schools can be obtained by writing:

**President  
Broadcast Education Association  
National Association of Broadcasters  
1771 N Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036**



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# Job Hunting

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**N**ow that you've acquired some training for a particular job, what's next?

In this age of specialization, it has become harder for young people to get an entry-level job in television and then move on to a rewarding career. The applicant must aim at a particular job, and then develop a plan to get there.

This means that if you are interested in learning how to operate television equipment, don't waste your time as a desk assistant in the news department. In many stations, the desk assistants only work for the news staff and, because of union regulations or station rules, may be prohibited from operating the broadcasting equipment.

The best way to get in the door is to apply for an internship that may or may not be paid. An internship amounts to an investment in your future. You find out if you like the industry or the particular department of the TV station and you also start making contacts that will probably prove important throughout your career.

In many engineering departments, "vacation relief" help is hired during the summer months. If you have some technical experience, one of these jobs may provide you with the entry and experience that will lead to a full-time job.

In order to find out the call letters and locations of TV stations, you should look through one of the industry directories. The

public library or publishers of these directories should be able to provide you with one of the following:

**BROADCASTING YEARBOOK**

1735 DeSales Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20036

**TELEVISION FACTBOOK**

Television Digest, Inc.

1836 Jefferson Place, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20036

The National Association of Broadcasters maintains an Employment Clearinghouse to help increase the number of minorities and women employed in the broadcasting industry. The Clearinghouse disseminates information on minorities and women in broadcasting and encourages their involvement in the industry. For information contact:

**Director of Employment Clearinghouse**

National Association of Broadcasters

Minority and Special Services Department

1771 N Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20036



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