

MAKING IT IN TV DESIGN: TIPSHEET

29th April 2014

If you want to work in a design capacity for television production, these compiled tips from industry professionals will point you in the right direction.

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ART DEPARTMENT

Don't give up! I've found people either being very, very, niche in their speciality, or having a very broad range of different skills can be both as successful as each other.

Commitment to the long term goal is very important. The complete commitment to either honing a specific craft, or constantly gaining lots of new skills, carries them through.

Although a lot of jobs/recommendations happen through word of mouth (which is both great and very annoying) I think **an online presence is very important.** I've been in meetings with my seniors looking at CV's and after a quick Google search, if the applicant didn't have an IMDB profile, their CV got chucked in the bin. [IMDB is contributed to by other crew members so it sort of acts like a kind of verification].

Also, **know how hold a phone conversation.** It's just plain weird when twenty something year olds are scared of using the phone.

OLIVIA YOUNG – ART DEPARTMENT

Sending an abridged, to the point, CV emailed via industry listings, such as Kays or LinkedIn etc... won't go amiss. Personally, I prefer a friendly call/chat (ideally prompted from a known source) to establish a rapport.

Try, try and try again. Serendipity = working in telly. No two days are same, keep plugging away whilst you amass experience.

DOM CLASBY – PRODUCTION DESIGNER, THE HANDSOME CHAPS

Get a Kay's Art dept. diary. This lists prop houses and other specialist TV and film companies and is an art dept. bible!

You'll have to **continuously cold call and email contacts.** Different people will be working at different times and it's a matter of luck with regards to responses. At one point I've sent 200 emails and only got one meeting out of it. **You'll need a thick skin and have to just keep at it.** Once you find a Designer you work well with, you will be re-hired and hired again – it's worth it.

GABRIELLE WILLIAMS – PRODUCTION BUYER

Try and **mix with people who are where you want to be.** For example; while you're trying to break into the industry, if you need to make some cash by working in bars or restaurants, you'd be better off in a location beside the BBC or ITV etc. getting to know peoples faces so in the event that you do get an interview, hopefully you'll have served them with a nice big smile.

Keep yourself interesting. Go and see exhibitions, watch films and TV, show interest in creativity, architecture, art etc... Have an opinion on your industry - this will make you interview much better.

STEPHEN BRYCE – PRODUCTION DESIGNER, THE HANDSOME CHAPS

Read the credits at end of a show you enjoyed to find out the names of the production manager/production designer. Send a personal email regarding interest in the show/their work and ask for work experience with them. This often leads to work as colleagues learn your name and capabilities.

VICKLE CARTER – ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER



COSTUME

Do your research first and then send your CV to people you want to work with. Follow it up with a phone call. Phone them every six months or so to remind them of your existence. Most people don't mind and to be honest if they are rude, you probably don't want to work for them!

Get business cards made with an image of your work on the front. moo.com allow you to have several different images on a pack of cards. It allows you to show off your work instantly and also stands out from any other business cards they might have. Carry a few with you everywhere you go, you never know when you might need them.

MICHELLE BARRETT - COSTUME DESIGNER

BECTU Early Bird [advanced knowledge about regular and one-off projects compiled by the industry union, available to members].

Make sure you keep in touch with everyone you get on with on shoots. Just keep the relationship going, if you can, not just when you are looking for work, but in general as those will be the people who you meet through the rest of your career.

SUSAN KULKARNI - COSTUME DESIGNER

If you send cold emails **always follow up with a phone call.**

Build a website even if it's only a blog and include recent examples of your work

JENNY JARVIS - STYLIST

MAKEUP

The IMATS (makeup trade show, London 27th to 29th June 2014) is a good place to network, listen to talks and buy kit essentials. It's always worth bringing an up to date CV with you.

ROSALIA CULORA - HAIR AND MAKEUP ARTIST

Assist, assist, assist. Assisting is the best way to learn tips, techniques and secrets from professional, jobbing artists. You will learn invaluable lessons that college or courses cannot teach you. You will also learn set etiquette and how to act/behave behind the scenes. Nothing can prepare you for freelance life like actually being around sets, crew, celebrities and production. You will only get this opportunity by assisting.

Always say yes! To assisting, testing with up and coming photographers/stylists/models, work experience, hobby projects/low budget jobs. You will get to meet people in the industry, be around professionals, build up your portfolio and if you say no just once, someone else is waiting to step in your place and that's who will get called the next time!. Being keen and available is the first step in the door.

GEMMA WHEATCROFT - CELEBRITY HAIR AND MAKEUP ARTIST



ART DEPARTMENT

Cliché, but **being yourself, and not afraid to say what you really think**. Obviously, there are times when you should stay quiet, but not all the time, use your judgement. There will always be people who are technically better than you in whatever skillset, but if you're completely yourself and you work hard, people will rehire you because you're easy to work with.

Wanting to work hard is essential. I've been amazed how many people of my age I've known on jobs, who are beginners in the industry and they think nothing of spending all day at their desk on Facebook, chatting to their mates not really working, and not being bothered. They might get away with it for a while but if you're branded as 'lazy' on set, it tends to stick and becomes harder to get recommended for jobs.

OLIVIA YOUNG – ART DEPARTMENT

Saying yes a lot and actually being able to fulfil the promises associated with this easily blurted word will lead to many a reward.

Being able to 'really listen' is a super power, learn it!

Ceaseless energy is always a bonus and a **practical hands on approach + common sense** is priceless. It goes without saying, **a full driving licence** is essential - knowledge of van driving in a city could set one candidate above another.

DOM CLASBY – PRODUCTION DESIGNER, THE HANDSOME CHAPS

Being pro-active is a must. If you're in a meeting – take notes! Hugely surprising the number of people who don't *[take notes]*. It's ok to feel shy, especially on a first day, but common sense has to prevail. Don't wait around for someone to ask you to do something – be ready, be alert.

GABRIELLE WILLIAMS – PRODUCTION BUYER

If I send an assistant out for a prop or material, I expect they to come back with something. Even if it's not right, an alternative and **thinking 'outside the box' is such an important factor and key strength** in the art department.

Speed – working fast and good communication with others, especially production

Tidiness, organising and, sadly, making tea! When you are busy in the art department someone who just tidies and makes tea, makes me happy. Simple pleasures.

Realising **where to spend your budget**. What's important and makes a statement and what's not.

VICKLE CARTER – ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER

Manners, punctuality, maturity, a sense of humour, stamina, someone who will try and stretch themselves but at the same time know their limits and will own up to them. Diplomacy and ability to engage with a wide range of people will get you far.

STEPHEN BRYCE – PRODUCTION DESIGNER, THE HANDSOME CHAPS

COSTUME

Dressmaking skills! Above all, to me, that's essential. The rest can be taught on the job. You need to be able to adjust a dress, knock something up quickly or take trousers up with confidence. There is often no time for me to teach you, so it's the first thing I look for on a CV. Once I have hired you it's all about **fitting in with my team and the crew in general. Use your initiative, be friendly, manage your budget, turn up on time.** As long as you get the job done and you fit in, you can have as much fun as you like, and I'll rehire you.

Be professional though, I don't want to hear about chatting on set, keeping your phone on or getting in the way of the crew. You need to be polite to talent and crew because it does feedback to me if you are not.

MICHELLE BARRETT - COSTUME DESIGNER

A newbie would stand out with a **covering letter that shows they have looked at your work and good reasons as to why they would like to work with you.** I like a clear list of their genuine skills too. It is great when they spell their letter and CV correctly.

I would rehire them if they demonstrated a real **aptitude for the role and were consistently keen** and interested in the jobs assigned them. I would also value a good sense of humour and smile - an invaluable costume asset.

SUSAN KULKARNI - COSTUME DESIGNER

Can do attitude! Forward thinking, **always one step ahead**, enthusiasm, willing to help with anything no matter how mundane the task.

JENNY JARVIS - STYLIST

MAKEUP

A newbie stands out from the crowd when they **go the extra mile.** I know it sounds obvious, but sometimes the small things get forgotten. For example; on a make-up/hair trailer, it could be that the towels need to be washed. So it's nice when a trainee can spot things, and is **helpful with tasks without always being asked.**

ROSALIA CULORA - HAIR AND MAKEUP ARTIST

Keeness, willing, reliability and availability at short notice is essential. Always say yes and be willing to work any hour/day at a moments notice (as I did when I first started assisting) will make you stand out. Common sense, a friendly, warm demeanour and keeping busy are also great traits. **Being able to get on with a task unaided and taking the initiative** to get things done without having to be asked will also make you stand out from rest! If I come back to the makeup room from shooting to find a tidied work area and clean brushes, you're coming back!

GEMMA WHEATCROFT - CELEBRITY HAIR AND MAKEUP ARTIST

ART DEPARTMENT

Even if you're just starting out and don't have a full kit **make sure you have the basics** so you can get on – pencil case, scissors, scalpel, ruler, tape measure, notebook, gaffa, camera, laptop if you can. **Always have bin bags and plastic sheeting.**

GABRIELLE WILLIAMS – PRODUCTION BUYER

Black tack, bulldog clips, string, Pinewood superglue have saved me many a time.

Gym/strength training! (You have to lift and carry a lot in the art dept, especially if you want to make a good impression and get stuck in with helping people. Being able to carry stuff by yourself means you're more useful, harsh as it sounds.

OLIVIA YOUNG – ART DEPARTMENT

My essential tool is my **glue gun!** I really value the skill of being able to turn nothing into something. You need to do this always on set and even more when on location.

VICKLE CARTER – ART DIRECTOR/DESIGNER

Being able to foretell the future with a wry smile will get you everywhere, trust me!

An understanding of the creative process is requisite and will become essential knowledge for your Art Dept mind-tool-box. As will being au fait with classical aesthetics, the ability to use a paint brush 'proficiently' in balance with drafting a CAD drawing, understanding of theatrical chancery, construction materials, having **a firm grasp of graphics generating software** and being able to **balance budgets** will also shower respect.

Client interaction/relationships will come only through a dedicated proven track record and wisdom.

Being personable and fabulous will always keep you in good stead. Also, an eye for soft furnishings and the ability to throw an epic flower arrangement together at 5:30am in the morning will gain you recognition.

A stand-by kit and mobile internet connection will enable you to resolve any whimsical last minute crucial prop requests from somewhere in the vicinity. Good luck and be cheeky!

DOM CLASBY – PRODUCTION DESIGNER, THE HANDSOME CHAPS

Knowledge of **Adobe Creative Suite** is almost essential, in particular, **Photoshop, Illustrator and In Design.**

Charm! **Manners gets you so much more.**

General good hand skills, for things like drawing, sewing, painting etc.

Technical drawing or CAD drawing ability is a massive advantage.

Get to know your prop men - they have all the tricks. The floor is where it all happens, that's where you'll learn the most.

STEPHEN BRYCE – PRODUCTION DESIGNER, THE HANDSOME CHAPS

COSTUME

Have your own basic kit which should include, but not be limited to; lint rollers, needles various sizes, several basic colours of thread, pins, safety pins, toupee/tit tape, masking tape, iron on tape, stain removal wipes, shoe polish, rags, spare belts, belt hole punch, travel iron, Febreze, scissors, digital camera with spare batteries and memory cards or cables.

Your own sewing machine is also helpful.

Experience in ageing or breaking down clothes, particularly if you want to work in period costume, can be very useful.

Pattern cutting and a general knowledge of fabrics an advantage.

Knowledge of the new standby apps can be helpful. For example; Sync on Set (free) <https://www.synconset.com/> in which you can list a scene, character, items and the actors name and sync it with the other people in your department. Continuity Pro (£34.99 and iOS only currently) is a more in depth app. We used Costume Continuity Pro on my last job and found it really helpful.

MICHELLE BARRETT - COSTUME DESIGNER

A keen sense of detail and an ability to problem solve and work under intense time-pressure when physically tired is essential.

An in depth knowledge of period costume and fashion is beneficial.

A working **knowledge of where to source items will be useful.**

A good knowledge of sewing is very helpful too.

SUSAN KULKARNI – COSTUME DESIGNER

MAKEUP

It is so important to **invest in a good set of quality makeup and hair brushes!** These are the tools of your trade! Bad, cheap, dirty brushes will give the same finish to your makeup. The better quality, the easier the application.

Great products are also a necessity. I built up my kit by working part time in high end beauty boutiques when I was starting out. You get to learn about the products, play with different brushes, apply them on all types of people/skin types/tones eye/lip shapes. It's a great way to hone your skills, choose your favourites and you also get a decent discount!

My secret is my set bag or 'sac magique' I make sure it's fully stocked with all of the essentials! Mints, perfume, plasters, sewing kit, safety pins, headache tablets, sanitary products, hand sanitiser, Berocca, hand fan, tooth picks, a sharpie, clothes roller...you name it, I'll have it! It's always good to be the 'I have that' go to girl on set!

GEMMA WHEATCROFT - CELEBRITY HAIR AND MAKEUP ARTIST

ART DEPARTMENT

Pledge furniture polish removes sticky glue and labels.

STEPHEN BRYCE – PRODUCTION DESIGNER, THE HANDSOME CHAPS

Oyster card! No jokes, it's a wonderfully transportable tool... from applying/smoothing vinyl onto acrylic, scraping paint flecks from a window panes to getting the tube/bus home (should you live in/around London and/or your chauffeur be lost).

DOM CLASBY – PRODUCTION DESIGNER, THE HANDSOME CHAPS

COSTUME

Cheese graters to age clothes.

Vodka works great to prevent odours when you can't get to a washing machine.

Use a towel to put down on tables/work benches/floor etc to iron on.

Sharpie pens in various colours to write in names to garments quickly and sometimes cover up marks.

Vaseline helps to age collars and cuffs.

MICHELLE BARRETT - COSTUME DESIGNER

Small hair straighteners. Use instead of an room to smooth collars and aprons onset where there is no iron access.

SUSAN KULKARNI – COSTUME DESIGNER

Dress shields/guards keep clothes fresher for longer.

Use a normal steam iron in your hand instead of an industrial steamer. More effective than hand held steamer but do be careful – it's hot!

JENNY JARVIS - STYLIST

MAKEUP

Shaving foam. It is fantastic at removing make-up blood from the hair/body.

For example, when filming a fight sequence, there could be situations where the blood ends up in different places, and to avoid continuity errors, shaving foam is a quick fix solution - it's saved me many times!

ROSALIA CULORA - HAIR AND MAKEUP ARTIST

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