

Careers in Television Broadcasting

Broadcasting is a fast-paced and dynamic industry that is continually changing. Careers in broadcasting can be exciting, unique and rewarding. As with all forms of business, broadcasters seek to recruit qualified individuals who want to learn and grow with the changes of the industry. People who work in broadcasting often wear several hats, but they generally fall into one of four categories:

- Management/administrative
- Sales/sales support/underwriting
- Engineering/technical/computer
- Production/programming/news

Following are some general descriptions for jobs in television. Remember that each station is unique in its staff structure and no two stations are organized in the same fashion. The size of a station and of the market it serves often dictates the number and type of jobs available. This is particularly true for Alaska. The descriptions below provide an overview of just some of the positions and responsibilities.

Account Executive - The representative of the station who solicits advertising from commercial business. Account executives develop working relationships with local business leaders and with local advertising agencies and client representatives.

Assignment Editor - This person is responsible for the gathering of news that goes into a program. Usually a team effort, they set news coverage priorities, organize the logistics of camera crews and reporters and arrange for the various satellite feeds and live on-scene coverage.

Business Manager - Responsible for all financial transactions. Business managers are generally expected to have extensive professional backgrounds in accounting and financial management.

Chief Engineer - Heads the technical staff. The chief engineer is the senior technical person at the station.

Continuity Writer - The continuity person writes some of the local commercial and promotional copy. Must be detail-orientated and have skills in computer and word-processor operation.

Director - The person responsible for the actual on-line execution of the program. Serves as producer for entire programs or for the production of portions of larger programs.

Electric news gathering (ENG/photographer) - They work alongside reporters to capture events on tape and to produce live, on-scene coverage of breaking news. In addition to operating the video camera and sound, ENG crews must also operate sophisticated microwave and satellite transmission equipment to feed programming or news segments back to the studio from remote locations.

ENG Editor - The person who edits tape taken by the ENG crew. ENG editors work with producers, reporters and writers to build news packages from the raw tape sent in from the field or gathered on feeds from networks or other sources.

Executive Producer - This person coordinates the content and presentation of broadcasts under the direction of the managing editor and news director.

General Manager - The person responsible for every aspect of a station's operation. This position requires business knowledge, leadership ability and a technical understanding of how a station operates.

General Sales Manager - The person responsible for producing all advertising revenues for a station and for hiring, training and supervising the station's sales staff. The general sales manager must also be adept at understanding the business climate in the community and must have a strong knowledge of the

interests of the station audience. Some stations have multiple levels of sales managers, including national, regional and local sales managers who focus on various aspects of sales.

Maintenance Engineers - Responsible for the repair, maintenance, installation and modification of all of the electronic equipment for live programs and during commercial breaks in network and taped shows.

News Anchor - The most visible members of the news staff. These are people who appear as up-front personalities on local newscasts. Ideally, the news anchor is a complete journalist, familiar with reporting, live coverage, skilled at writing and, in some cases, can produce news packages.

News Director - The news director supervises the news department. He or she must understand budgeting, personnel management and the technical aspects of television. In addition to having a firm understanding of the community service role of broadcast journalism, he or she must have solid news judgment -- the ability to determine which stories are the most informative and of the greatest value to the local viewer.

News Reporters - The key front-line people in the news department. They are at the scene of every kind of event. Local news reporters must be excellent writers who are capable of working quickly and accurately to sum up the key elements of a news story, making it understandable and relevant to the audience.

Producer - This person develops and organizes local programs and is responsible for scripting, story development, booking of guests and overseeing field production and editing.

Production Assistant - A production assistant works with all production personnel, helping where necessary.

Production Manager - This person is responsible for all the details required in the actual production of local programming. The production manager supervises producers, directors, floor directors and stage managers.

Program Director - The manager of the programming department. The program director works closely with the general manager and sales manager to determine and direct the station's policies and to plan the most effective program schedule for the station.

Promotion Director -The job involves promoting the station's image, programs and activities. He or she conceives and executes a variety of written and taped station promotion spots, secures station advertising in other media, and, in conjunction with the sales department, develops ways to retain current viewers and attract new ones.

Receptionist - The duties of the receptionist vary according to the size of the station. This position is ideal for understanding all aspects of how a station operates.

Station Manager - The chief operating officer of the station. The station manager must have effective personnel management skills and a thorough knowledge of all aspects of broadcast operation.

Studio Engineers - Responsible for operating all of the equipment necessary for the production of a program. This includes the studio cameras, the audio console and studio equipment.

Traffic Coordinators – The persons responsible for data input into a television computer system. All program formats, commercial schedules are input to create a daily log.

How do I get my first job in broadcasting?

If you are in college, get involved with your school newspaper, radio or television stations. Take courses that will give you a background in one of the job-specific knowledge areas that have been outlined above.

If you are out of college and you are looking for your first job, check with your school's career center. If you're looking for a career change, think about those aspects of your background that give you skills in a particular area. Teachers, for instance, often make good sales people because selling involves teaching clients how advertising can help their businesses grow. Computer skills are translatable across many fields, including broadcasting -- particularly as more aspects of station operation becomes digitized and it is fast becoming a requirement for entry-level positions.

Some college and community stations will enlist volunteers to host programs during school breaks and summer vacation, in order to keep the station in operation. Many cable TV systems offer free training in video production as part of their community access obligation.

Recognize that you will not be Dan Rather -- or get paid like he does -- in your first job. Be flexible. Be willing to take jobs that are not exactly what you want, just to get that proverbial foot in the door. Be willing to work overnight, weekend and holiday shifts that no one else wants.

Look into internships and training programs; many stations offer them. While an internship may not get you a paycheck, it will give you hands-on experience and a resume item.

Hang in there and be persistent (but not obnoxious). The maxim in sales is that it takes 30 no's to get one yes.