
Getting Started in Broadcasting

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Out of the one million young men and women who will receive degrees from America's colleges and universities this spring — and the millions of others who will graduate from high schools and technical schools — a sizable number are likely to look to broadcasting for their first jobs. The lure of a career in radio or television for this generation is not difficult to understand. As a group, they have spent at least as much time in front of their TV sets as they have in school; television has inescapably left its imprint on their dreams and imaginations. As the most avid consumers of popular music in the country, they have also had radio as a constant companion. And very likely, in some parts of the country, they are already acquainted with the new media brat on the block — cable television — which may one day open up vast opportunities for their talents.

Taken together, radio and television seem to offer everything — glamour, creative work, exciting new technologies, huge salaries, and the chance to grow with an industry that is growing in all directions. It is no wonder that many young people see their future in broadcasting's glowing electronic rainbow.

There may be a pot of gold at the end of that rainbow, but getting started in the industry can be very difficult and frustrating. Over the last ten years, I have talked with many young men and women who want to start their careers in radio or television. No matter what their background, they express similar concerns: How do I find my first job? Given my skills and interests, what sort of job should I look for? Where will this first job take me in my career? What are the working conditions in the industry really like?

From our work in mass communications at the Markle Foundation, we are in a

position to offer some partial answers. In addition, I will draw in this report on my own conversations with leaders in the industry, on a small research literature that deals with the subject, and on a series of interviews last summer with people in radio and television.¹ By giving young job seekers a better notion of what to expect, perhaps we can reduce some of the anxiety that accompanies the start of any career, and give them a little perspective that may help them sort out their future priorities.²

Where the Jobs Are

Anyone looking for a job in broadcasting (or narrowcasting as cable is sometimes called because it can reach smaller, more specialized audiences) quickly discovers that jobs for beginners are scarce. To find out why that is so, let's look at the numbers. The most recent figures from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) show that about 190,500 people are employed in radio, television, and cable in the United States; since these figures are always somewhat out of date, the current total is probably closer to 200,000.

It is much harder to pin down figures on the number of people who are looking for jobs. A recent annual survey of colleges and universities that offer course work in radio and television shows more than 17,000 juniors and seniors majoring in broadcasting, plus almost 2,000 students studying for a master's degree in the field, and approximately 3,600 junior college students in broadcasting. Many more job seekers will come from other majors, and from high schools and technical schools. Recognizing that the above figures are probably a small part of the total, it might be conservatively estimated that a minimum of 20,000 new people seek jobs in the field each year.

Some observers have suggested that there is a yearly turnover of about 10 percent in

broadcasting jobs, which means that about 20,000 openings occur when people in the industry leave their positions. Of course, many of these people are moving to another job in broadcasting, leaving fewer total vacancies for beginners. It is doubtful that more than 10,000 new people are hired by the industry each year. This means that at best there are two people looking for every available starting position, and for some of the more desirable jobs that promise entree to the industry — for example, the pages at NBC — there may be one hundred or more applicants for each of the few openings.

Where are those jobs? Unfortunately, there is no information available on the numbers and types of jobs that have been offered to beginners in the past. We can, however, get an idea of the distribution of jobs among the various broadcasting media from the FCC's most recent figures:

	Number of jobs	% industry
Cable television	21,294	11
Commercial television	54,666	29
Non-commercial television	9,852	5
Commercial radio	72,193	38
FM radio	11,086	6
Non-commercial radio	3,785	2
Broadcasting headquarters	17,666	9
	190,542	100%

Somewhat surprisingly, though television seems to be the pervasive medium, there are actually more jobs in radio. Not only does radio employ more people than television, it is ordinarily an easier place for a beginner to get a first job. As for cable, though new systems are opening across the country and the fledgling medium is attracting a lot of attention, it accounts, as of now, for only a small percentage (11 percent) of total employment in the industry.

The overall employment picture in the industry is not encouraging. For that reason, many young job seekers might think about trying to work first in an allied field and then entering broadcasting later. People who work in advertising, talent agencies, independent

production companies (which make programs for TV), and industrial communications (which offers experience in various media skills, for example making training films), and other businesses that provide services to broadcasting sometimes learn the skills and make the contacts that enable them to find jobs in the industry through a side door.

For a lucky few, however, it is sometimes possible to start directly in the field — although luck isn't the main ingredient. The jobs will go to those who have an edge in talent or skill, who are highly motivated and persistent, and who go about hunting for jobs in ways that are likely to be successful. To see how it's done, consider a few success stories.

Radio

Frank is twenty-five years old and earning \$12,000 a year as news director for a suburban FM radio station. How did he get where he is? After graduating from high school, he had embarked on an acting career, but, deciding it was not what he wanted, he went back to school to study radio. While in college he had several part-time jobs and two internships at local radio stations. When he began looking for a full-time job, he sent out resumes and tapes to radio stations located in his area of the country, obtaining names and addresses from *The Broadcasting Yearbook*.³ Every week or so he would call to check for openings, and he kept sending additional tapes. Finally, he was offered a job as a weekend music person at his present FM station, and although his main interest was news, he took the job. Later he had a chance to fill in for the station's newsman, who was on vacation. Shortly thereafter, when the regular newsman left, Frank was offered the job. He is now a one-man newsroom, doing all the newscasts and sometimes going out to cover stories. He works long hours but hopes to be able to hire a second person in a few

months. After two or three years of learning this job, he expects to move on to a larger station.

Judy, who is in her mid-twenties, was recently hired in the sales department of a medium-sized radio station at a training salary of \$800 a month. A history major in college, she came in contact with radio through a friend who was working at a local station. She decided to go into radio sales, selling commercial time, but she could not land a job at first, partly because of her lack of experience, but also, she is convinced, because the people who interviewed her did not believe women were particularly effective in radio and TV sales. As a result, she went into selling cosmetics in New York, later became a regional saleswoman in the garment industry, and then, with a good sales record to show, was hired by a small city newspaper to sell ad space. She still wanted to work in radio, however, so she began calling a few station managers and sales managers. This time she not only had experience, she demonstrated with repeated calls that she did not give up easily. She was hired at a small station, but after six months moved to her present job at a bigger station which is part of a broadcast group that offers her a variety of future opportunities.

Bill, who is now in his thirties, has become general manager of a radio station in a small city after having worked for about ten years at several other radio jobs dating back to his college days. While studying for a degree in engineering, he had a part-time job at the local radio station, which enabled him to get a foot in the door for his first job after college as a disc jockey for a small radio station. At one station or another, Bill had a chance to be a sportscaster and also helped out in sales. Moving finally to a station in a larger market, he had a succession of responsibilities, and

