



dear john

Q  
A

## What makes a good TV presenting showreel?

The thing I like most about this week's question is that it is not set in the past tense. Sadly, a lot of the time the showreel-related questions I get asked are more likely to be, 'Can you have a look at my showreel and tell me what you think?'. Sometimes, that's a perfectly sensible enquiry – as with headshots, CVs and other marketing materials, it's always a good idea to keep your image up to date. But it's not so much fun when the person asking the question has just forked out a lot of money for a showreel that is never going to achieve what they hope for in terms of advancing their presenting career. I'm not just talking about the shoddily produced ones either and if you are paying for someone to make a showreel for you, or even having a go yourself, you should be committed to high quality. Even

though digital and production technology has advanced to the point where beginners' showreels can look glossy, be well lit and be shot in proper studios, it hasn't quite managed to solve the fundamental problem of beginners' showreels. No matter how many digital effects and state of the art visuals your DVD contains, the thing that marks out the beginners with potential from the ones who have wasted their money is not the production quality of the showreel so much as the quality of the presenter being shown off. Acquiring the skills to demonstrate that quality requires an investment of time and money, and as our two experts this week will confirm, an effective showreel may have a short running time, but getting the right material on there is unlikely to be something you can do overnight.

### what the experts say...



#### Kathryn Wolfe

**Kathryn is senior lecturer in media performance at the University of Bedfordshire. She has extensive TV directing experience at the BBC and ITV, and has directed dozens of established TV presenters, including Chris Tarrant, Danny Baker, Penny Smith, Nick Ross, Selina Scott, Paul Ross, Justin Fletcher and Hermione Cockburn. In 2004, Kathryn set up Pukka Presenting and has personally coached hundreds of TV presenters. She also runs introduction to presenting courses at the Actors Centre in London.**

"Your showreel is your calling card – the reel itself may not get you the job, but it should open doors and at least get you a screen test or an interview. It should leave the viewer wanting to see more and showcase your talents, rather than those of the camera operator or editor.

"Remember that a heavily edited reel does not tell the producer or agent how many takes you needed and can disguise several short recordings stitched together to create a longer item.

"So if you want to impress, shoot a piece to camera that lasts about one minute, to prove that you can speak for that length of time without faltering. If you record the piece on location while

walking from a distant point towards the camera, you will show your skills of memorising a script or ad-libbing, as it is unlikely that you would be reading from a prompt in that set up.

"You should show how you communicate with other people, so include an interview. Research your interviewee, deliver a short intro and keep the questions to the point. Interviewing will reveal how you relate to others and your listening skills – a key quality needed for TV presenting.

"There is another type of interview, stopping people on the street and asking them for a short comment on a topic, known as vox pops. These can be great fun, especially if you think of a good question to ask, and the item should allow your personality and confidence to shine through, show your ability to deliver appropriate responses and think on your feet.

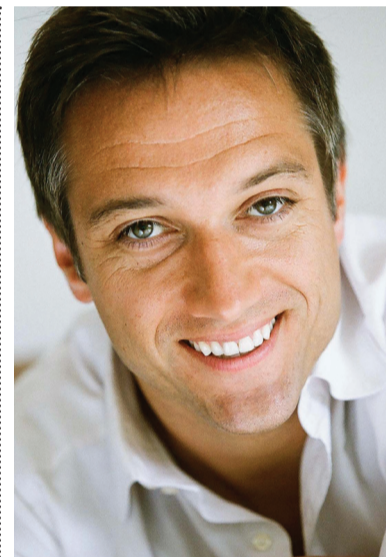
"The ideal duration of a TV presenter showreel is anywhere between three and five minutes. If you cannot sell yourself in a few minutes, then perhaps there is nothing worth selling. On the basis that an 'item' is about one minute, then three or four items are all that is needed.

"Don't feel rushed into making a showreel. It is important to know how to talk naturally to the camera and if you have trained as an actor, you may need to undo some previous training – replace 'Be in character and don't look at the camera' with 'Be yourself and do look at the camera'.

"If you try to make a reel before you have trained properly, it might be a record of your training, not a reel you are proud of. So my advice is get training first, practice, shoot some test pieces and then create items and a reel that is unique to you."

#### Howard Corlett

**Howard worked in the travel industry before changing direction to become a presenter and actor. He has worked in various genres – travel, lifestyle, entertainment and corporate – and has picked up TV, web and live event credits along the way. He entered Life TV Search**



**for a Presenter in 2006 and came out the winner, resulting in fronting his own series, Seven Wonders of the Weald, on Sky. Having recently presented for a Japanese TV show promoting London, he is currently developing a travel format.**

"When thinking of starting off as a presenter, it's definitely important to see whether it's your cup of tea before investing heavily in showreels or other marketing materials.

"Doing a proper training course allows you to gauge whether, a) you actually like it and b) whether you are suited to it – not necessarily the same thing. When I worked with Kathryn, I not only had the chance to learn sight reading (autocue), talking to time, interviewing techniques and working with talk-back, but just as importantly, I had the chance to learn from my mistakes in the training room – not have them on display on my showreel.

"I do think there are synergies between acting and presenting, but there are also key differences – as an actor you are playing a character, as a presenter you are yourself.

"In terms of the camera, as a presenter, you always involve the camera, whereas it's only in very specific TV/film roles that an actor would break the illusion and look into the camera – David Brent springs to mind – but normally it's a capital offence."

### dear john sums up...

**I asked both Kathryn and Howard to comment on the difference between acting and presenting as this is an issue that often comes up when actors are looking at branching into other fields of work – or perhaps I should say, often doesn't come up, but should do. As noted above, the complete beginner to performing and presenting certainly needs to be wary of the minority of companies which exist solely to sell very generic and very expensive showreels to the unwary under the guise of 'presenter training'. However, it would be very wrong to suggest that there isn't good training out there and even more so not to remind performers who do have experience in other areas of work that good presentation is a very specific skill in itself and, as such, is not as easy to blag as we might think. In fact, it is one of those areas of work where if the art of doing it well is to make it look effortless, there is actually quite a lot of effort and practice involved behind the scenes to achieve that effect.**

*John Byrne is an entertainment industry career advisor and the author of several career guides for performers, including The Right Agent Right Now ebook, written with Mary Elliott Nelson and available for download from [www.showbusiness-success.com](http://www.showbusiness-success.com). Howard can be contacted on [howardcorlett@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:howardcorlett@yahoo.co.uk). His reel and credits can be viewed on [www.spotlightcd.com/interactive/cv/1410-8978-2044](http://www.spotlightcd.com/interactive/cv/1410-8978-2044). Kathryn may be contacted through her website, [www.pukkapresenting.co.uk](http://www.pukkapresenting.co.uk), where there are details of upcoming courses during the year. There are still places available on the next introduction to presenting course at the Actors Centre, London, on May 16 and 17. Details and enrolment information can be found at [www.actorscentre.co.uk](http://www.actorscentre.co.uk)*