



dear john

Q  
A

## What are the main differences between acting and presenting on camera in terms of the skills you need to display?

One of the oldest career crossover adages is that every comic wants to play Hamlet and every dramatic actor wants to be a comic. There should be a more modern version, given so many current TV presenters appear to have started life in another branch of the performing arts. Mind you, it is probably more rare for presenters to make a successful transition in the opposite direction. Doubtless, any actor who dared wonder why a presenter would actually want to swap the glamour and ease of studio life for a more precarious

and demanding existence on the stage would quickly be faced with a whole army of working presenters, confirming that, for the majority rather than the celebrity minority, their job is usually a lot less glamorous than it seems and is just as insecure workwise. Full-time job or not, it is definitely an attractive extra string to the actor's bow. With advice on how to make the right noises in this particular area, here are two experienced voices with perspectives on presenting from both sides of the camera.

### what the experts say...



#### Kathryn Wolfe

**Kathryn Wolfe is senior lecturer in Media Performance and course leader of Television Production at the University of Bedfordshire. She has extensive television directing experience at the BBC and ITV and has worked with dozens of established television presenters. In 2004, Kathryn set up Pukka Presenting, coaching hundreds of presenters and launching numerous careers.**

"When you start presenting you may need to undo most of your acting for camera training – replace 'be in character and don't look at the camera' with 'be yourself and look directly at the lens'. For screen acting, you might only address the camera during a soliloquy, but when TV presenting, you speak to the viewer, via the camera, almost all of the time.

"TV presenting is about having the confidence to be yourself, maybe a heightened version for the camera, but you are not playing a role. Screen actors relate to the other performers in the scene, but the TV presenter communicates to a camera on a tripod. How can you make it real for an audience you cannot physically see?

"Most presenters imagine the camera is a person, a friend, a

typical viewer and the key to a successful performance is to make it conversational. Although you need to maintain an eyeline to camera, to avoid the rabbit caught in headlights expression, keep a relaxed face with plenty of smiles. Aim to be warm, friendly and inviting.

"Typically, TV presenters have very little rehearsal time, usually just a run-through before the take, sometimes working with scripts received at the last minute. They frequently work from non-scripted material, bullet points or ad lib from a producer's brief. TV presenters need to think on their feet and cope when things don't go according to plan. The screen actor will often have the option of a retake – just not possible when presenting a live TV show.

"Many people combine acting and TV presenting, but it's the journalistic skills of being able to create meaningful script material on the spot that really set the two apart."

#### Shona Collins

**Shona is a journalist and regular guest presenter on Channel 4's How to Look Good Naked. She is often asked to appear on television and radio to talk about her expertise in body confidence.**

"In acting, every role you play can be a fresh start, building up a new character. Presenting, the role is always you, so you have to be careful. Each job you do builds up your rep, no matter how small and if you are lazy or act like a diva, there are a thousand mini-presenters yapping at your feet, waiting for you to fall.

"You have to work on how you come across, both on and off the telly. Presenting is more about your personality itself being bankable.

'Audition' becomes 'coffee with various important people'. No more standing in front of a table, script in hand, instead you have to come across as witty, cool and charming all at once and all before you have ordered your drink.

"But don't be disingenuous. One of my favourite pieces of advice was to be myself, but 'more American', meaning, I think, to be a bit more emotive and smiley. This is so ridiculous – you can only be yourself – and you must strive to maintain that as a presenter.

"In the sort of TV I do (swiftly made, on the street, docu-style), you are often required to script everything you do on the spot. Then present it coherently, along with recapping the back story, predicting what might happen and leaving breaks for editing. And on top of that, they make you walk at the same time. It takes multi-tasking to



a new level. In all seriousness though, it is an entirely different skill from acting, one that needs to be honed. Be willing to learn new words. Talking is now your job, don't be afraid to learn how to best express yourself.

"PS. Don't get upset when you see yourself 360 degrees – it's a shock for anyone. Furthermore, HD television is a liar. Promise."

### dear john sums up...

**Whatever the different approaches needed in each area, one thing acting and presenting do have in common is that there are a large number of people going for a small number of jobs. And the decent jobs that are out there will tend to be given to the chosen few, not so much based on what you can do as on what you have done before. If you don't have several prime-time series under your belt as yet, it's very important that any of the skills mentioned above that you have managed to gain are clearly displayed on your CV, showreel or in any audition you do manage to talk your way into. General acting experience probably won't cut it unless you are already a name that viewers will tune in to watch. This isn't to suggest that the skills you have developed from your acting aren't transferable – just that it is up to you to make it clear how they relate to the presenting job you are going for – if you can't convey your suitability to the programme makers, you will certainly have difficulty getting the chance to display your presenting talents to a wider audience.**

*John Byrne is an entertainment industry career advisor. Details of career advice sessions, workshops and copies of The Right Agent Right Now ebook are available from [www.showbusiness-success.com](http://www.showbusiness-success.com). Visit [www.pukkapresenting.co.uk](http://www.pukkapresenting.co.uk) for further information and details of TV presenter training with Kathryn Wolfe. Kathryn's book: So You Want to be a TV Presenter?, published by Nick Hern Books, is out now. Shona may be contacted via [www.unitedagents.co.uk/shona-collins](http://www.unitedagents.co.uk/shona-collins) or via Ruth Larkin on [rlarkin@unitedagents.co.uk](mailto:rlarkin@unitedagents.co.uk). Next week, John Byrne edits The Stage's TV Presenting supplement*