



dear john

Q
A

Television presenting is a very competitive market – what’s the quickest way for a beginner to get a foot in the door?

It’s not too many years since I did some work on a live daily children’s television show from a studio in central London.

Although the show had a very low budget, it was never a challenge to find celebrity guests, since celebrities always require publicity. The main headache was to find enough young people to be in the audience. In our 24-hour, multi-channel, reality show world, it isn’t very hard at all to get on TV in one way or another.

What has always been hard is building a sustainable career and retaining some control over its direction. As our two guests who have both got through the door recently and are now working on staying there explain, not only has the challenge not changed, neither have the talents required to meet those challenges.

Planning and perseverance rather than opting for the fast track remain the best approach to take when attempting to rise to the top.

what the experts say...



RICHARD ASHDOWN

in such a competitive market.

It is a mixture of who you know, your talent, luck and being in the right place at the right time. I have to admit that when I finished my TV presenting training last year, I expected the phone to start ringing just like that.

“Lastly, I cannot express how much marketing yourself can make a difference towards your success. For example, using Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn and other virals. You should keep an eye out for what other presenters are doing at all times. However, don’t just copy – create your own brand and stay unique.”

Katarina Bahula

Katarina Bahula is an emerging television presenter, originally from Slovakia, who has been living in London for several years. She is currently using her presenting skills for an independent documentary maker while also developing a side project aimed at minorities in the UK.

“My top tip would be to stay truthful to yourself regardless of how successful or not you might be as a presenter. As a non-native emerging presenter, I’ve doubted myself many times as to whether I would ever get into the UK presenting market.

“However, I’ve turned that difference into my unique selling point and it has started to pay off. I was invited to audition for CBBC through the Emerging Talent section and the experience was just fantastic. Even though I didn’t get the role, it boosted my confidence incredibly.

“I also believe you have to be very proactive, find your niche and have some great networking skills

David McClelland

David McClelland trained as an actor at Guildford School of Acting in the nineties and since leaving has worked in many areas of the business as an actor and director on tours, in the West End and abroad. Shows he has worked on include Blood Brothers and Beauty and the Beast. However, his priorities changed recently when he became a dad, and – with training from Kathryn Wolfe – he has started to make a very conscious move towards a career in presenting.

“Without a doubt, the most important piece of advice I’ve received was in session one of day one when working with Kathryn Wolfe – ‘have a specialism’, an area in which you are knowledgeable and passionate.

“For me this is technology, and with my resting work being heavily tech-based, it seemed to be a perfect match.

“It has given me a great starting point – recently I did a guest expert spot on TV, talking about online music streaming, and I have also



presented a couple of pilot television shows about photography and online security.

“I’m now editor for a consumer technology website (<http://techspot.tv>) and am a frequent Twitter user (@dekhmcclelland) all of

which has helped enormously to build my profile online and to add credibility and authority when applying for presenting jobs in this area.

“Although I’ve been very fortunate in finding work so far, making the transition to being a presenter has also been quite daunting, almost like starting all over again in a new career. I found myself asking about how I should find work, what my CV should look like and what I should expect in an audition, questions I last asked more than ten years ago, at the beginning of my acting career.

“However, I do think that having a background as an actor can put you at a great advantage – you still need to have the same proactive and determined approach to seeking out work, to self-promotion and to making contacts.”

dear john sums up...

As both David and Katarina have found, the challenge of breaking into the presenting market – even with experience in other performing fields as David has – is to develop a unique selling point, and to communicate that selling point to your market with focus. It is important not to repackage or recycle less relevant material as is sometimes the career changer’s approach. With that in mind, I’d agree with Katarina that Spotlight’s Emerging Talent section is certainly worth considering for presenters new to the industry, or performers aiming to expand their brand, rather than pitching new entrants in to a competitive field against more experienced faces with longer work records. As well as being featured in its own section of the existing presenters’ directory and on the Spotlight website, successful applicants have the opportunity to come in and record short intro material at the Spotlight Studios. A discount on the annual fee is offered for applicants who already feature in other Spotlight directories. Although the deadline for appearing in the current edition is in the next few days, I have managed to get it pushed back to Monday, July 19 to allow interested Dear John readers time to apply. Also, see my TV presenting supplement on pages 21-24.

John Byrne is an entertainment industry career adviser. Details of career advice sessions, workshops and copies of The Right Agent Right Now ebook are available from www.showbusiness-success.com. David McClelland’s website is at www.davidmcclelland.co.uk. He is represented by Nicola Roberts Management (www.nicolarobertsmanagement.com) on 020 8375 5555. Katarina Bahula may be contacted on 07725 818234 or via www.spotlight.com