

Breaking into the Business:  
A Guide to Creating a Dynamic Resume Reel and  
Securing a Job in Today's Television News Industry

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ABSTRACT

Broadcast journalists are experiencing turbulence in their field of expertise due to increasing digitalization and decreased funding. It is becoming commonplace for reporters to work as one-man-bands, or “multimedia journalists,” shooting and editing their own video in addition to writing and reporting. For people looking to begin a career in the highly competitive broadcast news industry, there is a great deal of information to understand and consider prior to beginning the job search. Creating a dynamic resume reel is central to landing a job as an on-air reporter. However, with the development of digital-first and multimedia journalism, there are certain techniques one must demonstrate in their reel to convince a news director that he/she can work as an excellent reporter. This study analyzes new trends and demands of television reporters in hopes of discovering fresh ideas about creating an impressive reel and launching a career in television news. The information collected in this study provides recommendations prospective broadcast journalists may implement in an effort to stand out to news directors and media professionals in our constantly evolving media landscape.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### *Introduction*

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Successful television news reporters are evolving along with our changing media landscape. Aspiring journalists who hope to land a job in the broadcast news industry must hone their skills and demonstrate to potential employers that they understand how to cover news accurately, efficiently and effectively on multiple platforms. Job candidates have a matter of seconds to catch the attention of a news director with a resume reel. Additionally, they are expected to be able to shoot and edit their material in addition to writing and reporting. As Kenny King writes in an article for SurviveTVNewsJobs.com, the expectations for reporters in today's digital-first industry have changed dramatically. "Things are much different now than they were even just five years ago, and they'll continue to change. There are no rules anymore, but there are some guidelines that may help you, the wide-eyed fresh graduate, navigate the vaguely-charted waters of getting a TV news job." (King, n.d.) Budding journalists must stay abreast of the latest trends and demands of their desired occupation.

This project-based paper is a first-hand account of my development of job application materials, including a resume reel, written resume and website, as well as research into how the occupation has evolved from news broadcaster to multimedia journalist. This will include an analysis of the appropriate and effective ways to pursue and attain a professional career in on-air news broadcasting.

#### **Background of the Problem**

The news industry is demanding more of their employees than ever. For television news reporters, this means learning how to shoot and edit video on top of collecting facts and

composing a story for a daily newscast. In the past, reporters worked as a team with a photographer who was responsible for shooting all the video and editing it. Additionally, social media was not in existence or considered important to media professionals until recently. Today, reporters in small markets, often in the early years of their careers, are required to shoot and edit all their own video plus engage with viewers through social media. Consequently, reporters are increasingly referred to as “multimedia journalists” which is essentially a technical term for a “one-man-band.” It is important to understand how this career has evolved recently and actively practice the skills that are now required of multimedia journalists.

In order to be hired as a television reporter, one must create a reel that demonstrates his/her ability to produce excellent stories as a multimedia journalist. With so many alternative options for consuming news, fewer people are turning on their televisions to watch broadcast news. This means reporters must grab the attention of the viewers at home so they stay engaged in the newscast and do not change the channel. When one is applying for jobs and sending out his/her reel, news directors will make their hiring decision based upon whether the applicant was able to catch their attention within the first moments of the resume reel. News directors are also looking for evidence that applicants can shoot and edit their own material creatively and effectively. Hundreds of people vie for the opportunity to work in television news, which is why it is imperative to understand how to make oneself stand out as a job candidate. This study will show how job applicants can create an outstanding resume reel and market themselves effectively to news directors.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyze and understand what qualities and skills are desired of television reporter job applicants in order to start and secure a career in broadcast

news. It can seem intimidating to talk to news directors and find out exactly what they are looking for in job candidates. This study will provide that highly beneficial information to readers in an easily accessible and digestible format. This senior project will be a valuable reference for students and people who hope to pursue a career in broadcast journalism, especially those who want to be on-air reporters.

### **Setting for the Study**

This study will be completed as a part of the research and data collection for a senior project at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo during the Winter 2015 quarter. Interviews were conducted with four current or former news directors who gave important insight regarding what they look for in job applicants and how new reporters can be most successful in their career. The news directors were interviewed prior to officially beginning this study at an exclusive reporter boot camp called Aprta Academy in December 2014. The information collected from the new director interviews will be supplemented with thorough research compiled in a literature review. The goal of this study is bring budding reporters up to speed on the latest trends in broadcast news, straight from the experts who make the crucial hiring decisions.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to determine the how to create an eye-catching resume reel, go about applying for reporting jobs, interviewing with news directors and understanding what is expected of multimedia journalists in today's digital-first industry. The questions were developed with the intent to analyze the state of broadcast journalism and the goal of finding answers to questions about how to get started in television news with first-hand accounts from my personal experience, media professionals and qualitative interviews.



1. What are news directors looking for in a resume reel? What skills must one demonstrate in a resume reel to show he/she can excel as a multimedia journalist?
2. How have resume reels changed in recent years with the onset of digital journalism? How does one successfully brand him/herself during the job application process?
3. How should one approach small market news directors during the job search and application process?
4. What information should an applicant research and know about television markets and stations prior to interviewing with a news director in order to stand out?
5. How should one negotiate job offers, contracts and salary?
6. What are some tips on being successful in one's first market?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are presented to the reader to assist in comprehension of this study of budding professionals in the field of broadcast journalism.

Television News Reporter: "Television reporters gather information, investigate leads, and write and report stories 'live' or 'on the scene.' Occasionally they tape their newscasts, sometimes called 'packages,' for a later broadcast. Reporters must be able to accurately compile notes, conduct interviews, determine the focus of a story, and quickly organize and complete a story. Because of the increased pace and efficiency of electronic news-gathering techniques, reporters are sometimes hard-pressed to properly complete their stories before they are called upon to go 'live.' Reporters with good memory and poise who are able to speak fluently and extemporaneously will fare well." (Princeton Review, n.d.)

Multimedia Journalist (MMJ): "Multimedia journalists gather information, write stories, make broadcasts and use social media to keep the public informed about current affairs and events that are happening in the world. The best definition of multimedia journalism is the process of

combining text, images, sound, videos and graphics, to tell an interesting story. Multimedia journalists often work for newspapers, radio or television stations or use computers in social media areas.” (“Multimedia Journalist”, n.d.)

Resume Reel: “A video or audio presentation designed to showcase your talents to a potential employer. The idea is that the employer can see what you are capable of based on the examples you have supplied” (“How to Make a Demo Reel”, n.d.).

News Director (ND): “A TV news director is the person in charge of a news department at a television station. A TV news director must be skilled at all aspects of news -- from how to get a story to how to avoid being sued. That requires a basic knowledge of media law in addition to being an expert at journalism. While a TV news director hires staff and is a manager, he/she is also a coach. That means knowing everything from the basics of shooting video to how to write compelling TV news stories. If that's not enough, a TV news director also needs to be an expert at branding. Simply presenting stories isn't enough in today's competitive media environment. It takes market research and knowing how to reach the target demographics of your audience.” (Halbrooks, n.d.)

Digital-first journalism: “‘Digital first’ strategy is in comparison with the ‘platform first’ practice of legacy media platforms (print, TV, radio). Web and mobile platforms demand us to adopt a platform-free mindset for an all-inclusive production approach – create the (digital) contents first, then distribute via appropriate platforms.” (Lin, 2013)

Standup: “The stand-up is considered part of the story rather than an afterthought. The reporter addresses the camera and advances the story with a brief bit of information. Sometimes, stand-ups are used as a way of branding the story with the reporter's and the station's names. Treat stand-ups as a bridge to help you transition from one part of the story to another. Avoid using

stand-ups at the end of the story, and never start a story with a stand-up, unless it's a same-day, look-live story.” (“Stand Ups”, n.d.)

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 consists of the statement of the problem, background of the problem, purpose of the study, setting of the study, research questions, definitions of key terms and an explanation of the organization of the study. Chapter 2 serves as the review of literature, which analyzes and compiles existing information from academic and expert sources. Chapter 3 is the methodology of the study and includes a review of the data sources, interview design, data collection methods, data presentation and the limitations and delimitations of this project. Chapter 4 is a compilation and analysis of the data collected. It includes short biographies of the interview participants, a list of the research questions and the resulting research data. Chapter 5 concludes this study and discusses the information collected from the interview with industry experts in comparison with the research compiled in the review of literature. Finally, it will suggest recommendations for aspiring reporters based upon interviews with industry experts.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### *Literature Review*

This review of literature focuses on the existing materials related to developing one's resume reel and beginning a successful career in the television news industry, including an analysis of how the occupation of TV news reporter has evolved into a multifaceted job with the onset of digital journalism.

#### **Much More Than A Reporter**

The job of a television news reporter has developed substantially in recent years as stations are forced to operate on smaller budgets and stay relevant in a changing media landscape.

“We see that news organizations are taking heed and evolving the nature and definition of the desirable journalist,” Jennifer George-Palilonis wrote in her book *The Multimedia Journalist*.

She includes a recent job posting from a Phoenix broadcast station that says it was seeking:

a reporter/photojournalist/video editor who will produce content for multiple platforms as assigned. Successful candidates will have a demonstrates ability to deliver compelling TV and digital media packages, have strong on-camera presentation skills including live presentations, and the time management skills to produce content for multiple platforms on deadline. You'll use the latest technology, including lightweight photography and editing gear. A working familiarity with Avid Newscutter and programs such as Final Cut Pro, Photoshop and Flash is a plus. (Palilonis, 2013, p. 12)

This illustrates the increased responsibilities and qualifications of a broadcast journalist. The Princeton Review's summary of the career of a television reporter begins by saying “A reporter's job is not for the faint of heart. It requires a great deal of stamina, physical fitness, and unflagging self-motivation” (The Princeton Review, 2015). Industry professionals are now

referring to reporters as “multimedia journalists” because they are required to not only research the facts and write the story but also shoot and edit video, and sometimes run their own live shots without the aid of a photographer.

The term “one-man-band” reporting is nothing new in the media business, but the workload has increased with the introduction of social media. In an article by Poynter.org entitled “10 Way Young Journalists Can Make Themselves More Marketable,” the author suggests aspiring reporters develop skills in photography, video editing, mobile journalism and to be active on social networking sites. “New organizations are looking for young journalists who can share their knowledge of social media with other staffers.” In addition to getting a one and a half minute story on air by 5 p.m. and doing a couple live shots, reporters are expected to post throughout the day on social media like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to further draw viewers into the reporting process.

As much as the industry is evolving, some things will and should always stay the same. CBS News Radio’s Peter King is quoted in an article for Poynter.org saying “Being a good human being, having common sense and curiosity – those are traits that make a good journalist” (Wallace, 2004).

### **What News Directors Want in a Resume Reel & How It’s Changed**

News directors say reporter applicants only have a matter of seconds to catch their attention and be considered for a job at their station. This is why it is crucial to research exactly what impresses news directors in a resume reel. NewsTeam Boulder of University Colorado Boulder advises prospective reporters to consider this when creating their reels:

Mostly the news director wants to know if you can cover the lead story, therefore they’ll need some serious content. News directors look for your ability to tell a story. Questions

they ask themselves: Do you have instincts about writing? Are the sound bites compelling? Did you make the story interesting and worthwhile?

In news director Brian Mercer's article for the Radio Television Digital News Association, "9 Ways to Get Your Resume Reel Into the Small Stack," he candidly explains that news directors watch reels for five to ten seconds. Due to that, he advises applicants to build a fast-paced montage of live intros, tags and standup bridges. It will communicate that an applicant understands pacing and lets the news director see him/her in a variety of situations. (Mercer, 2015).

News director Steve Kraycik wrote an article for [SurviveTVNewsJobs.com](http://SurviveTVNewsJobs.com) in which he recommends applicants start their reel with a one to one and half minute montage of their best standups. Kraycik also suggests balancing hard news material with lighter moments to show off personality through moments where one laughs and smiles. He says to pull the best two seconds from each standup and splice it together. Then an applicant may want to include a full standup that he/she is especially proud of before transitioning into news packages. For total time, he says a reel should be between five and eight minutes. (Kraycik, n.d.) Lastly, [MediaCollege.com](http://MediaCollege.com) reminds applicants to include contact information at the beginning and/or end of the reel in a full screen graphic so news directors can get in touch with them right away ("How to Make a Demo Reel, n.d.). Many people applying for their first job get the material for their resume reel by shooting standups and putting together packages at an internship. Joe Duke, a talent recruiter for CBS News, said it is fine for an applicant to take material from a reporter at an internship and make his/her own story from it for a reel, but be careful not to plagiarize. "I'll know if a young reporter didn't write the story because it will be better than the rest of the reel," Joe said. (Reardon, 2006)

## **Branding During the Job Application Process**

The job application process is tedious and time consuming. Due to the nature of this field, broadcast journalists often become public figures thus personal branding is an important skill to demonstrate in job applications. This means clearly communicating who you are to news directors, your skill set and what positives you can bring to their operation.

TVJobs.com compiled a list of pet peeves from news directors and hiring managers across the country. One of the most frequent pet peeves managers have when reviewing job applications is misspellings and grammatical errors on resumes, cover letters and emails (“Pet Peeves: Deadly Mistakes That Job Applicants Make,” n.d.). As a journalist, one is expected to have an excellent command of the English language in order to effectively communicate information to viewers. If it is obvious that an applicant did not go over his/her job materials to ensure the information was correct and free of errors, a news director will worry that that potential hire would make mistakes on the job everyday.

When it comes to actually applying for jobs, the process is reflective of our digital era. In an article for [SurviveTVNewsJobs.com](http://SurviveTVNewsJobs.com), it is recommended that applicants stick to electronic communication such as email instead of making phone calls. If you are unsure about whom to send your materials to, they suggest checking with the human resources department at your desired television station. (“Decoding applications: How to apply for jobs,” n.d.) Additionally, it is important to be active on social media so potential employees can get a sense of who you are and who follows you in the digital world. Mallary Jean Tenore suggests young journalists establish a presence on many social media platforms but remember to keep the content clean because future employees will undoubtedly scrutinize it. She also says to build an online

portfolio that includes a biography highlighting your professional experience and interests, links to your work and links to your other social media sites. (Tenore, 2014) Increasingly, reporters have personal websites so that news directors and other industry professionals can become familiar with who they are and what they are capable of doing as a journalist.

### **Approaching News Directors & Preparing for the Interview**

Job interviews are the first impression of what kind of skills you can bring to a station. Your eligibility for a news reporting job is built upon much more than just an excellent resume reel. In an article on [SurviveTVNewsJobs.com](http://SurviveTVNewsJobs.com), it cautions prospective reporters to do their homework on the station and the city where they are applying for a job. It even goes as far to say you will come off as “sloppy, self indulgent and therefore a potential liability” if you are not well versed on a potential employer. The article suggests studying recent events in the city where you will interview and watch the station’s newscasts online to get an idea of what the local issues are and how the station goes about covering news. In addition, applicants should research the news director and other heads of management to try to understand their news philosophies before going into their office for an interview. When you do go into the interview, you should be prepared to have ideas on how to cover a story happening today and make some relevant, strong story pitches to show the news director how you think. The article goes on to say, “It is not uncommon to be given a quiz on the movers and shakers in the city where you will interview.” This underscores the importance of doing your homework thoroughly prior to the interview. The article also warns that interviews can include questions about your personal life. This is not unusual or overly intrusive in the news industry because as it says in the article, “Covering news is voyeuristic. It can be intensely personal.” Be prepared to answer questions about family,



relationships, faith and life goals. (“Preparing for job interviews, what to research and watch,” n.d.)

In the *Broadcast News Handbook*, author Forest Carr emphasizes the importance of taking the time to research who the news director is at the station where you are applying and to address your letter with their name instead of a generic salutation like “To Whom It May Concern.” The *Handbook* also cautions applicants to read job postings very carefully. If an ad says “No Calls,” you should not call. News directors are busy people and will make time to call you if they want to talk to you. Many news directors include “no calls” in their listings to test if applicants can follow directions. (Tuggle, 2007)

### **Negotiating the Offer & Success in Your First Job**

In many of the articles and materials I have read throughout this research study, experts warn that the application process can be long and discouraging. However, if you are persistent and talented, there is a job out there for you. Once you have been offered a job, it is important to understand how to negotiate logistics like salary, moving expenses and benefits. Journalists sometimes hire agents later in their careers when they are applying for jobs in major markets, but for small and even mid-market jobs, most people are able to land gigs without the help of an agent. The *Broadcast News Handbook* advises job applicants that if a news director attempts to lowball you, to make a counteroffer and come to a mutual agreement on salary that will allow you to live, albeit meagerly. Some news directors will tell you upfront that the salary is nonnegotiable. Contracts are another convoluted element to the job search process. Be sure you understand every line of the contract and familiarize yourself with contract “outs.” Chances are you will not work at a small market for your entire career so when a better opportunity in a

bigger market comes up, you need to know whether you can get out of your contract reasonably and without burning bridges. (Tuggle, 2007)

Many media professionals compare their first years in the news industry to a masters program. For young reporters getting started right out of college, it is often a dramatic and challenging lifestyle change. When Executive Producer Doug Prusak is interviewing a job candidate he says, “I’m looking for ‘fit.’ Will they be ‘clubhouse guys’...will they have leadership potential. I never look for worker bees. They’ll burn out.” This may seem surprising however Prusak’s point about “burning out” is valid because newsrooms want to hire people who will stick around long enough to be worth their while. (Clapp, 2013)

Nancy Reardon reminds readers of her book that a career in television is a series of stepping-stones. “Every job you have leads to the next.” She warns not to step on other people in hopes of getting ahead. Reardon stresses that television is a team effort; it is a collaboration of reporters, photographers, editors, managers and production workers. “Just because you’re the one in front of the camera doesn’t make you IT,” Reardon writes. A pearl of wisdom and time-tested saying Reardon reminds new reporters of is, “You’ll catch more flies with honey than vinegar.” Her lesson is less about the news industry and more about basic personal relations. Her point is to show how paramount it is that budding reporters establish strong, professional and friendly relationships with coworkers because a journalist’s success is dependent upon their reputation. (Reardon, 2006)

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### *Methodology*

This chapter will outline the methods utilized to collect data and information for this study including the data sources, interview design, presentation, limitations and delimitations.

#### **Data Sources**

For this study, we will focus on advice and input on how to secure a job as a broadcast news reporter from the industry experts whose job it is to make those hiring decisions: news directors.

#### **Participants**

1. Cristi Jessee: News Director, KBAK/KBFX Bakersfield
2. Doug Barden: News Director, KSBY San Luis Obispo
3. Jim Lemon: News Director, KEYT/KCOY/KKFX, Santa Barbara/Santa Maria/San Luis Obispo
4. Gary Brown: Talent Agent. Former News Director

#### **Interview Design**

The following questions were asked of each of the industry experts and served as data sources for the study:

1. Who is the type of candidate you are looking for and what makes him/her stand out?
2. What do you need and want to see on a resume reel?
3. What can an applicant do to set him/her apart from the competition?
4. How important is your online and social media presence?
5. Does one need an agent to get his/her first job in the industry?
6. What is the best way to approach news directors regarding job openings?

## **Data Collection**

This interview was not a traditional sit-down, one-on-one situation. Rather, it was a panel discussion at the Aptra Academy Reporter Boot Camp in December 2014. Three current news directors in small, entry-level markets, plus a talent agent who was formerly a news director, spoke with aspiring reporters about what they are looking for in job candidates.

## **Data Presentation**

The data collected during the Aptra Academy Reporter Boot Camp News Directors Panel was digitally recorded and later transcribed. The transcription of the panel discussion is available upon request.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations exist based on opportunistic access to news directors and time restrictions. Limiting factors include the generalization of the study due to a small sample size of four participants. Every news director is looking for something slightly different in job applicants and each has a unique outlook on the news business and their personal news philosophy. Also, this study is based upon a panel discussion in which the questions were generated by a variety of people with individual questions and concerns that were not always applicable to others in attendance. Furthermore, a longitudinal limitation is present because this study was completed as an undergraduate senior project over the course of ten weeks. Delimitations include the choice of analysis, attendance and participation in an exclusive panel discussion with four industry experts and additional self-imposed choices decided during the course of my study in order to maintain a tailored focus.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

### *Data Analysis*

This chapter will give further background on each of the media professionals interviewed in the study, summarize the participants' answers and finally, analyze and apply the material to the original research questions.

#### **Descriptions of Participating Media Professionals**

##### Cristi Jessee:

Jessee is the new director of KBAK/KBFX in Bakersfield, CA. She has served as news director at the duopoly for five years. Previously, she worked as a multimedia journalist at KXTV in Sacramento and then news director at KSAX in Alexandria, MN.

##### Doug Barden:

Barden is the new director of KSBY in San Luis Obispo, CA. He has served as news director at the NBC affiliate for five years. Previously, he was news director of KBAK/KBFX in Bakersfield, CA. Prior to that, Barden worked at KSTU in Salt Lake City, UT and KRNV in Reno, NV as an assistant news director. He started his career in broadcast journalism as a multimedia journalist in Cheyenne, WY and eventually transitioned into serving as news director of that station.

##### Jim Lemon:

Lemon is the news director of KEYT/KCOY/KKFX based out of Santa Barbara, CA. He has served as news director of the ABC/CBS/FOX triopoly for two years. Previously he was the news director of WITI in Milwaukee, WI for six years. He also worked as a news director at KOVR in Sacramento, CA, KGMB in Honolulu, HI and KSNT in Topeka, KS.

##### Gary Brown:

Brown is vice president of Talent Development and a talent agent for the Napoli Management Group. He represents a large number of reporters and media professionals working at television stations across the United States. Previously, he worked as a news director at WTOV in Steubenville, OH, WUPW in Toledo, OH, WPRI/WNAC in Providence, RI, WFSB in Hartford, CT and KGTV in San Diego, CA.

## Questionnaire

### *1. Who is the type of candidate you are looking for and what makes him/her stand out?*

Jessee:

“It’s all about ‘what do I need?’ Do I have too many blondes? Too many females? So don’t be discouraged. A lot of times if I see someone I really like but they’re not the right fit, I might reach out to you and say, ‘why don’t you get in touch with my news director friend in Eugene? He has an opening and you might be a good fit up there.’ I’ll usually help someone who I think has potential.”

Barden:

“I call them utility players. We need someone who can do absolutely everything, particularly in a small market. And unfortunately, that’s going to be required of you.

You have to start thinking like a reporter. If you can demonstrate your thought-process on how you find stories and what websites you go to and what stories you like and how you can localize this, you’re already a reporter.”

Lemon:

“Anyone we hire will need to shoot, write, edit, do the whole thing and I need to see that on your tape. If your tape shows only that is was very clear someone else was shooting your

standups, I might pass by it or at least question it. I'm going to wonder, can this person demonstrate to me that they can go out on Day 2 or Day 3, turn them loose on their own and be able to shoot their own content?

Honestly what we're doing all the time is casting. And frankly, we can't have a staff full of one type of individual and if you're that same type of individual, you may not necessarily go to the top of the list. What we really need is someone who can bring more diversity to our staff. It may have nothing to do with you, your ability and your skillsets, it may just be who I need for my station at that time."

Brown:

*Deferred answer to other panelists.*

## **2. What do you need and want to see on a resume reel?**

Jessee:

"On air candidates, I will look at your tape for three seconds. You really need to pop. That first shot, you need to look your best. You need to sound your best. You need to be doing something, show me something, get my attention because the viewers at home, you need to get their attention. If you're not getting my attention then, it's never going to work because the viewers at home are making dinner, they're taking care of kids, they're not giving you their full attention so that's why I need you to grab them and make them watch. So if I'm not interested in the first three seconds, they're not going to be either. That first shot is so crucial.

Your look needs to be consistent. If you make it past the three second mark, I don't want to see five different hair styles. I want you to look professional, have the same look throughout your tape.

I'd like to see active live shots or active stand ups in that first 30 seconds of your tape and then a really solid package right out of the gate. And if I really like you, I'll maybe watch your second package.

If you're sending out your tape and it's just not happening for 6 months, a year, you got to go for those producing jobs because if you're goal is to be in a major market, you can do that in five years or less as a producer."

Barden:

"I try to give it seven seconds and I always say, sadly enough your entire college career is boiled down to seven seconds. But sometimes it takes three and sometimes even less. Having a good reel is key."

Lemon:

"I'm looking for good writing, I'm looking for your ability to present yourself well on camera, your voice is essentially important. You must be able to have a good command of your voice in order to show me, I know what I'm discussing, I know what I'm telling you about and I believe that I'm trustworthy. All of those things are essentially important."

Brown:

*Deferred answer to other panelists.*

### ***3. What can an applicant do to set him/her apart from the competition?***

Jessee:

*Deferred answer to other panelists.*

Barden:

"It's all about how to differentiate yourself from the 200 other applicants that are out there that are on our desk. I call it self-promoting.



The biggest thing that I think really helps you is a personal website. If you can find a way to get your own website, because then you can really market yourself and it also allows us to get a sense that you're web-savvy. On your website, don't show me a picture of you doing a standup. Show me a picture of you doing your job. Show me a picture of you behind the camera, of you editing."

Lemon:

*Deferred answer to other panelists.*

Brown:

*Deferred answer to other panelists.*

**4. How important is your online and social media presence?**

Jessee:

*Deferred answer to other panelists.*

Barden:

"The first thing I'll probably do is check out your LinkedIn page and your Twitter page. I'll jump on your Facebook to see how you protect your own image. If you don't have a Twitter page, I probably won't even call you."

Lemon:

*Deferred answer to other panelists.*

Brown:

"I've found that when I have clients you have 20, 30 thousand Twitter followers, that gets them a look because if you're that engaged on social media, you're that engaged in the newsroom, you're that engaged in the field, you're that engaged socially."

**5. Does one need an agent to get his/her first job in the industry?**

Jessee: *Deferred answer to Gary Brown.*

Barden: *Deferred answer to Gary Brown.*

Lemon: *Deferred answer to Gary Brown.*

Brown:

“I find that most people come to me looking for an agent when they are in their second job, sometimes finishing their first. You don’t need one for your first job because the money if going to be so little, it won’t be worth it to give up 7 to 10% of your income to an agent that early on in your career.

If an agent wants money up front, that’s a no-no. If you have a job, you shouldn’t be paying for something you did on your own. You really have to trust the person. Ultimately, they work for you.

Agents are the rejection buffer. We are the follow-up people. We edit your reel, package it and send it out. The other big thing that I do is coaching.”

### ***6. What is the best way to approach news directors regarding job openings?***

Jessee:

“Do not call me at 4:45. Just don’t call me. If I see number I don’t recognize, I’m going to send you to voicemail and then delete it. The best way for me is to apply online and then send me an email with a link saying ‘hey I just applied online, will you take a look at my stuff?’ and on my weekends, I might be at home with my kids and pull up your stuff.

Sending emails with a link is great but apply on the website first, then follow up.”

Barden:

“Never stop by without an appointment. And calls really don’t do anything. What always seems to work is if you say ‘hey I’m passing through the area in the next couple days, would you

have 10 minutes to look over my reel?’ That seems to work and that might get you employed. If I’m in town and you’re passing through town, I’m going to make time to see you whether I have a job opening or not, but I might be able to recommend you to another station.”

Lemon:

“One day I got a call and they got me on a bad day. The ad said ‘do not call’ and they called and they got me on the phone and I said ‘what did the ad say? Did you read the ad?’ and they said ‘yes,’ and I said, ‘so you read that is said no phone calls?’ and they say, ‘yes,’ I said, ‘thanks but you’re disqualified.’ You take that risk. There’s that fine line of aggressiveness. If you get someone on a bad day, we’re all human and it happens. I wish I knew who that person was, I’d reach out to them today and say ‘I’m sorry about that but it happens.’”

Brown:

*Deferred answer to other panelists.*

## **Research Questions and Findings**

### ***7. What are news directors looking for in a resume reel? What skills must one demonstrate in his/her reel to show he/she can excel as a multimedia journalist?***

Jessee, Barden and Lemon certainly have commonalities in what they want and need to see in a job candidate’s resume reel, however there are discrepancies which highlights the reality that every news director is looking for something different.

Both Jesse and Barden admitted that they can make a decision on whether they like an applicant in the first ten seconds or less of the resume reel. Jessee emphasized that you must look attractive and sound eloquent immediately at the beginning of the reel. She also said to move and demonstrate something to viewers in an effort to grab their attention. Another important note

from Jessee is to have a consistent look throughout your reel. She recommended 30 seconds of active standups at the beginning of your reel, followed by two hard news packages.

In further discussion with Barden after the panel, he told me he likes to see multi-part standups. This means editing together a creative sequence of shots into a cohesive standup that demonstrates an action or issue. He suggested watching the reel of a former KSBY reporter, Cameron Polom.

Lemon focused on the quality of your writing in your reel and your ability to have a polished presence on camera. For Lemon, your voice and ability to speak articulately and extemporaneously is of utmost importance.

**8. *How has the job of a reporter changed in recent years with the onset of digital journalism?***

***How does one successfully brand him/herself during the job application process?***

The panelists all mentioned at some point in the discussion the absolute need for reporters to be active on social media in order to be successful at their job. Barden said an applicant's social media presence is integral to his hiring decision. He checks an applicant's LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook to get an idea of who they are and how they represent themselves online. He also suggested aspiring reporters develop personal websites. He said personal website development shows potential employers that a job candidate is technically and digitally savvy and takes pride in their work.

**9. *How should one approach small market news directors during the job search and application process?***

News directors are busy people. As Jessee pointed out, it is unwise to call a news director just before the 5 p.m. newscast. Be mindful of the time of day you contact a news director. They are probably more likely to respond to you when they are not inundated with issues they must address. Lemon focused on the 'no calls' clause and told an anecdote of an aggressive applicant

who decided to call Lemon anyway. Ultimately, it was a lesson in reading the directions. Taking the extra initiative to call might impress some news directors but one should be careful that they do not cross the line from being professionally persistent to overly pushy. Barden was less dramatic about the issue of phone calls but advised applicants to stick with email. For him and the other news directors, phones are pretty much pointless.

In speaking with Jessee after the panel concluded, she told me I should contact her the next time I am passing through the Bakersfield area and she would do her best to sit down with me for ten minutes or so. Barden focused on that point during the panel. It seems less pressuring for news directors to have a somewhat spontaneous meeting with a prospective employee and if an applicant plays his/her cards right, the news directors said it sometimes turns into a job offer.

***10. What information should an applicant research and know about television markets and stations prior to interviewing with a news director in order to stand out?***

The panelists did not answer this question directly however I was able to glean a few things about what one should know prior to applying. Barden said off the cuff that it is imperative that applicants find out the name of the news director and do not simply address their email inquiring about a job as “To Whom It May Concern.” He talked about demonstrating that you can think like a reporter. If the news director’s name is not easily found on the station’s website, an applicant should do some digging, perhaps call the station and ask who the news director is and then address the email to that person. Other industry experts at Apra Academy told me when applying to a station to read up on the news in that area for a couple weeks prior to the interview. This will prepare you to discuss local issues and how you will cover them for the station during the interview.

***11. How should one negotiate job offers, contracts and salary?***

If you are applying for jobs while wrapping up your last months of college, the job search can seem especially complicated. I spoke with Doug Barden after the panel about when one should start applying for jobs. He told me, “When I have a job opening, I wanted it filled yesterday so it can be hard to wait three months for someone to graduate from college.” However, he said if it is the right person for the job, they can usually work something out to delay the start date. His recommendation was to start applying about three months prior to graduation.

Young reporters often live paycheck-to-paycheck and contract-to-contract. Some industry experts I spoke with at Aprta Academy recommended not signing a contract in your first job in case it is a terrible situation and you need to leave. Some stations do not require new hires to sign contracts, however that is rare. Contracts are usually between one and three years long. “Breaking contract” essentially means quitting and leaving your station sooner than you agreed to when you took the job and it is highly frowned upon.

As Gary Brown said, the benefit of having an agent is having someone to negotiate offers, contracts and salary for you. Agents are expensive and Brown said in the panel, it probably is not worth hiring one until you are making more money in your second or third market and can realistically afford one.

### ***12. What are some tips on being successful in one’s first market?***

The news directors talked about not burning out in your first job. Working as an MMJ can be grueling. This quote from Gary Brown has stayed with me: “Enjoy the time as you move and maybe not be in such a rush because there will be a time when you look back and think, ‘whoa, what did I miss along the way?’” This industry can feel like a race to get to the top but the news directors stressed the importance of getting to know the community as not just the place you work in but as the place you live.

## **Comparison of Literature and Qualitative Data**

For this study, it was important to consider what industry experts had to say because the job of a journalist is constantly evolving as new trends emerge. There is also a relatively limited amount of relevant literature that currently exists in the academic world regarding multimedia journalists and resume reels because this model for television reporting is still developing. This section will compare and contrast the information collected in the literature review to the first-hand advice given by industry experts during the Aptra Academy News Directors Panel.

### ***Much More Than A Reporter***

The information from the research and from the in-person panel interview certainly coincides in explaining how the job of a television reporter has changed with the onset of digital news. The job posting in *The Multimedia Journalist* calls for someone who can “produce content for multiple platforms” and “use the latest technology.” Doug Barden echoed this by saying “I call them utility players. We need someone who can do absolutely everything, particularly in a small market.”

### ***What News Directors Want in a Resume Reel and How It's Changed***

There are a few minor discrepancies between the information presented in the literature review and what I was told by news directors during the panel, however it should all be considered with a grain of salt because there is validity in all of it. News director Brian Mercer wrote in an article for the Radio Television Digital News Association that news directors typically watch reels for five to ten seconds and want to see a fast-paced montage of live intros, tags and standup bridges. Cristi Jessee said during the panel that she watches reels for about three seconds before deciding whether she likes the person. She stressed the importance of looking and sounding your best in the very first moments of your reel. Jessee also underscored

being active and demonstrating something in order to grab the viewer's attention. One thing Jesse highlighted that I did not find in my research of literature is having a consistent look throughout your reel. This means having the same hairstyle and wearing professional and appropriate clothing. Your look should be polished and attractive but not to an extent that it distracts from the information you are reporting. There was some overlap between what the news directors and the literature said about creating a good resume reel but opinions will inevitably differ as the industry continues to change.

### ***Branding During the Job Application Process***

My literature review data and the news directors emphasized the importance of being active on social media in order to develop a personal brand. Mallary Jean Tenore recommends young journalists establish an online presence and create a portfolio of your work that is easy accessible to potential employers on the Internet. Doug Barden underscored this idea during the panel by saying he often checks applicants' LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook profiles as a part of his prescreening routine. He also suggested budding reporters build personal websites where they can post their work.

### ***Approaching News Directors & Preparing for the Interview***

The literature and the news directors provided some different answers to this question however it is all important and valid. My data focused mainly on doing plenty of research on a station and the area where it is located prior to a job interview. My research and the Aptra Academy News Directors Panel agreed that phone calls are not an effective way to get in contact with a news director to discuss job opportunities. Both stressed the importance of reading the job posting carefully and if there is a clause that says "no phone calls," one should most certainly follow that. In *The Broadcast News Handbook*, the author writes that many news directors



include “no calls” in their job postings to see if applicants can follow directions. Lemon once disqualified an applicant because they did not follow the instructions in the advertisement, which said not to call. Jessee said if you are going to call, it can be okay but to be mindful of when you place that call. According to her, it is unwise to call a news director just prior to a newscast. The consensus from my literature data and first-hand panel discussion is to contact stations and news directors via email.

### ***Negotiating the Offer & Success in Your First Job***

This question was more completely answered by the literature data than by the new directors. My research says to be willing to compromise when it comes to negotiating salary and be extremely diligent when it comes to signing contracts. Once reporters are in their second or third market, it may behoove them to hire an agent to deal with the often tedious and complicated process of looking for jobs, negotiating salary, moving expenses, benefits, etc. Gary Brown said during the Aptra Academy News Directors Panel that it is probably not worth hiring an agent to land your first and even second jobs because you will likely not be making enough money to afford an agent. Brown also encouraged panel attendees to not be in too much of a rush to climb to the top and rather spend time getting to know the different communities you work in so that you do not miss out on special life experiences.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations**

### *Discussion and Recommendations*

This study was performed to investigate best practices for building a resume reel and how to secure a job as a television news reporter. As of late, the title of TV news reporter has changed to “multimedia journalist” in order to better describe to duties of a broadcast journalist in today’s digital-first society. However, because the media industry is evolving so rapidly, there is a limited amount of academic and qualitative research on how to start a broadcasting career as a multimedia journalist. Consequently, it was essential to collect data from industry experts such as a current and former news directors in order to properly understand what is desired in a resume reel and how to be successful as a multimedia journalist.

I contemplated and found answers to a series of research questions by reading a multitude of articles and journalism textbooks, as well as applying information from industry experts to these questions:

1. What are news directors looking for in a resume reel? What skills must one demonstrate in a resume reel to show he/she can excel as a multimedia journalist?
2. How have resume reels changed in recent years with the onset of digital journalism? How does one successfully brand themselves during the job application process?
3. How should one approach small market news directors during the job search and application process?
4. What information should an applicant research and know about television markets and stations prior to interviewing with a news director in order to stand out?
5. How should one negotiate job offers, contracts and salary?
6. What are some tips on being successful in one’s first market?

I attended an exclusive panel discussion with four either current or former news directors who answered a variety of questions from people in attendance. I selected the most relevant

questions for this study and recorded the industry experts' answers. These questions are as follows:

1. Who is the type of candidate you are looking for and what makes him/her stand out?
2. What do you need and want to see on a resume reel?
3. What can an applicant do to set him/her apart from the competition?
4. How important is your online and social media presence?
5. Does one need an agent to get his/her first job in the industry?
6. What is the best way to approach news directors regarding job openings?

## **Discussion**

Analysis of the commonalities and discrepancies between the anecdotal and literature-based research in Chapter 4 allows us to draw conclusions regarding the original research questions:

### **Question 1: What are news directors looking for in a resume reel? What skills must one demonstrate in his/her reel to show he/she can excel as a multimedia journalist?**

This question served as the basis for the project portion of this study therefore I compiled thorough research in my literature review and learned a great deal first-hand from the news directors I spoke with. Understanding the necessary elements for creating an eye-catching resume reel is paramount to securing a job in the television news industry.

In light of our changing media landscape and tighter budgets, reporters are increasingly required to shoot and edit their own video. There are certain techniques reporters should demonstrate in their resume reels in order to convey to a potential employer that they have the skills to excel at their station as a multimedia journalist. Based on the research and information I gathered in this study, practitioners should focus on including creative, active standups during

which they demonstrate something that grabs the attention of viewers. The news directors at the Aptra Academy panel emphasized the need to look and sound your best in the first shots of your reel because they are likely to only watch for five to ten seconds before making a decision on whether they like you.

Moving forward, we may see broadcast journalists incorporating social media into their reporting and thus their resume reels more. My best recommendation to aspiring reporters is to book an appointment with the news director at your local television station and ask what he/she is looking for in a resume reel. Trends and demands of broadcast news will continue to evolve so prospective reporters must make an earnest effort to stay abreast of the latest changes.

**Question 2: How has the job of a reporter changed in recent years with the onset of digital journalism? How does one successfully brand him/herself during the job application process?**

This question was answered in part with Question 1 but its answer bears repeating. Throughout all the literature data and information collected from the panel discussion, it was stressed that reporters must take a digital-first approach to their job. This means being active on social media, establishing an online presence and in turn, developing a personal brand.

Doug Barden, KSBY news director, recommended creating a personal website where one can post a portfolio of work, a short biography and demonstrate his/her way of thinking as a reporter. Mallery Jean Tenore is cited in the literature review suggesting new reporters build an online portfolio that highlights professional experience, personal interests and links to work samples and other social media sites.

When the time comes to begin applying for job, prospective reporters should be meticulous in their review of their job application materials. In an article from TVJobs.com,

cited in the literature review, industry experts reveal that typos and grammatical errors on resumes and cover letters can be tremendously detrimental to an applicant's eligibility for a job.

**Question 3: How should one approach small market news directors during the job search and application process?**

This question was worth exploring because applying for jobs in the broadcast news industry is quite a bit different than other industries. My research, both from anecdotal and literature-based data, found that preparation is key going into a job interview and it is crucial to consider the schedule of news directors when trying to contact them. The literature I looked at recommended watching newscasts of the station you are applying to prior to your job interview to gain understanding of the local issues and the station's approach to covering news. Some news directors will even give applicants tests on local geography, market demographics, politics and writing as a part of the interview process.

The literature I read and the news directors I spoke with agreed applicants need to go to the effort to find out the names of the news directors they are contacting. In addition, pay attention to whether a job posting says it is okay to call or not. If it clearly says "No calls," then you absolutely should not call. It may seem like the aggressive, motivated approach but the bottom line is, if you call you are not following directions and it could result in a negative first impression. Doug Barden recommended sending an email to a news director saying you will be passing through town and ask if you can meet with them briefly to get feedback on your reel. It is a balance of being honest, modest and passionate in your pursuit of a career in news broadcasting.

**Question 4: What information should an applicant research and know about television markets and stations prior to interviewing with a news director in order to stand out?**

This question was best answered by the data collected from academic literature and compiled in my literature review. It was important to ask this question because your time in a news director's office is limited and you need make the best impression possible in hopes that they decide to offer you a job. The literature I read recommended researching the news directors and general managers of the stations you are applying to in an effort to understand their news philosophies and approaches to covering news. One advantage to web-based, digital-first news is that newscasts are easily accessible online. Take time to watch stories and critique them before you go into an interview. A news director will surely appreciate that you took the time to become familiar with his/her station and its news product.

**Question 5: How should one negotiate job offers, contracts and salary?**

This is a question that I will continue to figure out and answer as I go through my own job search. The *Broadcast News Handbook* advises young reporters to be reasonable in negotiating salary and know that your paycheck will be small starting out. The author said if it seems like a news director is trying to lowball you, come back with a counteroffer and find a way to compromise on a reasonable salary. Once reporters are out of the small markets, it makes sense to consider hiring an agent who will take care of looking for jobs and negotiating salary and contracts. Gary Brown, a former news director and current talent agent, candidly told attendees of the Aptra Academy News Directors Panel that it would be unwise to hire an agent for your first or even second job because you will probably not be making enough money to afford an agent. As one moves forward in his/her career, it will be important to network with agents and look into hiring one to help land that dream job.

**Question 6: What are some tips on being successful in one's first market?**

Making the leap from college student/newsroom intern to on-air reporter is both daunting and exhilarating. Let's review some of the best pearls of wisdom from the literature and industry

experts on how to be successful early in your career. Nancy Reardon wrote in her book *On Camera*, to be mindful that every job leads to the next one. Put stock in networking and developing meaningful connections with your coworkers. The television industry is full of egocentric people who are most concerned with being in front of a camera. Vanity is not a tenant of good journalism. Reardon reminds readers that getting newscasts on the air is a major team effort. This is an adrenaline-propelled business but Gary Brown warns young reporters to not get too caught up in the excitement. Brown told panel attendees to not be in too much of a rush otherwise you risk missing out on special life experiences. Enjoy this profession, value the people you work with and stay true to your purpose as a journalist.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

I am currently in the process of applying for jobs as I complete this study. Despite my long hours of research and analysis on this topic, I am still not necessarily an expert because I have yet to secure a job as a television reporter. However, studying this information so thoroughly has prepared me tremendously well for my job search. Looking ahead, I will remember these key recommendations for practice: grab the viewers' attention; be multitalented and multimedia; and finally, personal relations and perseverance come first.

**Grab the viewers' attention.** It is your job as an on-air reporter to inform people about what is happening in their community however, television news viewership has decreased substantially. Consequently, news directors need reporters to grab people's attentions so that they keep watching. Literature and industry experts agree the best way to do this is with active standups that demonstrate something to the viewer. A resume reel should include multiple examples of active standups and it will be up to the news director's discretion to decide whether

your presentation is attention-getting. I recommend requesting feedback from mentors, professors, industry experts and news directors at your local television stations on how to improve your active standups and create an excellent resume reel. I am grateful to my network of mentors and broadcast news professionals, all of who have been integral in the development of my reel.

**Be multitalented and multimedia.** If you have heard it once, you have heard it a million times. The news industry is changing due to an increasing focus on social media and online content. Additionally, budgets are tighter which means reporters are required to function as their own photographer and editor. Aspiring reporters should practice these skills by being active on social media, creating a personal website and shooting and editing video on a regular basis. As one of the youngest people in the newsroom, you will be expected to help keep the newsroom up-to-date on the latest trends and technologies.

**Personal relations and perseverance come first.** A journalist's success is completely dependent upon his/her reputation. Journalism is a study of people, the issues that effect them and the lifestyles they lead. It is a highly personal business. Journalists work long hours and develop close relationships with their coworkers. Those relationships will later be crucial to moving up in the industry because references and personal recommendations are important factors of the job application process.

## **Study Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study presented and analyzed the collective opinions of multiple industry experts and data from a review of literature, all of which can be applied immediately to the practices of someone pursuing a career as a television news reporter. The title of "broadcast



journalist” has transformed into “multimedia journalist” to reflect the evolving job description of a reporter in our changing, digital-first media landscape. “Change” is a reoccurring theme throughout this study therefore the information and recommendations compiled here will only stay relevant for a limited time. That being said, it will still certainly serve as a valuable resource of broadcast journalism students interested in the process of building a resume reel and securing a job as an on-air reporter. As I move forward with my job search, I hope to add an addendum to this study with my first-hand experiences of interviewing with news directors, negotiating offers and contracts and navigating my early years in the industry. Stay tuned and in the meantime, stop by my website, [christinafavuzzi.com](http://christinafavuzzi.com), to see my reel and a portfolio of my work. I am always welcoming constructive criticism and fresh ideas regarding how to be an excellent broadcast journalist.

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