

AUT

A FUTURE IN
**SCREEN
PRODUCTION**



A woman is operating a professional camera on a studio set. The background is a large, curved teal screen. The camera is mounted on a tripod and has various attachments, including a microphone. The woman is wearing a white off-the-shoulder top and black pants. The studio is filled with equipment, including lights and rigging, creating a professional production environment.

WHAT IS SCREEN PRODUCTION?

The evolution of the moving image over the years has been dramatic. TV channels no longer have captive audiences, and consumers have a wide array of viewing choices in the online space and across multiple media outlets.

Screen production professionals have to be versatile, adaptable, creative and technically competent in a number of specific roles or across a number of areas within a production. Skills in production for tablets and phones, as well as TV and cinema, are highly sought after.

But despite all the technological advances, the core skills of conceiving, writing and/or producing compelling material are still key for screen production professionals.

Are you fascinated by moving image and storytelling? Do you love to hear what people have to say? Are you technically savvy? Do you want to be involved in a highly creative, fast moving industry? Are you resilient, hard-working and a creative problem solver? Then screen production may offer great career opportunities for you.

OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

Globalisation trends

While local broadcasting and production remains strong, there is an increasing trend towards globalisation of distribution through the web. The challenge for New Zealand broadcasters is to make unique content that sells Kiwi stories into the global environment, something Denmark – for example – has done successfully in recent years.

Video for social media

The popularity of social media has led to a strong demand for video content from organisations and companies, providing plenty of work for freelancers prepared to take on niche projects. This requires skills in directing, production and the ability to figure out what the client wants, provide a creative concept and execute the brief.

Employment fluctuations

Around 14,000 people are employed in the industry, although numbers fluctuate depending on the productions. For example, big Weta productions and big US TV drama series come and go, impacting on employment levels. Production activities range from major international films, such as Peter Jackson's Hobbit trilogy, to small-scale web series start-ups such as Flat 3. Most employees are under 40 and most are contractors working multiple jobs in any one year.

Dominance of Wellington and Auckland

Screen production in New Zealand is based mainly in Wellington and Auckland. Wellington dominates the high-end post-production sector, producing animation, graphics and effects. Auckland is the major centre of production for domestic and international series.

Source: Statistics NZ Screen Industry Survey 2014–2015

Funding options

New Zealand productions are funded by a mixture of private investment and public money (New Zealand on Air, Te Mangai Paho and the New Zealand Film Commission). Crowdfunding is increasingly used for small-scale productions and as a way of supplementing larger budgets.

Multiple skills required

Professional experience is invaluable. New entrants to the industry need a mix of technical, organisational and creative abilities to maximise employment opportunities. Successful individuals build and maintain a strong network of professional contacts, a process that often begins at university and through work experience and internships.

WORK SETTINGS

People working in screen production are usually employed as freelancers or independent contractors, providing services to advertising, video and film productions as directors, producers, crew etc.

Contractors are responsible for buying and maintaining their own gear, and must take care of their health and safety, and taxes. A smartphone and/or laptop are basic tools for most roles. Work is not guaranteed and income may fluctuate year to year.

There is a lot of competition for jobs at a junior level. Multi-skilled graduates have a significant advantage when entering the workplace, eg a reality TV director may also have to be camera operator.

TYPICAL EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

National and local TV stations, such as TVNZ, Sky TV, Mediaworks, Country TV (Auckland) or Shine TV (Christchurch). The emphasis of this work is on finding and acquiring programmes, scheduling, and promoting brand with some local directors. Most of the actual content is produced on contracts from private companies.

Independent production houses, such as South Pacific Pictures, Greenstone Pictures, Warner Bros, make the bulk of TV programmes, including sport and lifestyle programmes. They also make feature films and other TV series.

Documentaries may be made by independent production houses or independent producer/director teams. They often operate with small crews of two or three.

Advertising agencies, such as DDB, usually contract production houses to make big-budget commercials, seeking the best directors and cinematographers. They may also run in-house audio-visual teams for smaller jobs.

CAREER ROLE EXAMPLES

ENTRY-LEVEL ROLES

Production assistant – carries out logistics, such as contacting people when required, organising delivery of items, securing all legal aspects (eg individual consents for music, performers, photos etc), getting contracts signed.

2nd to 4th assistant director – manages extras, ensures actors have make-up and costumes ready in time for scheduled scenes, enforces health and safety, stops traffic etc (the number of assistants depends on production – drama has more).

Runner – works under direction of producer and other production staff to ensure the smooth running of the production. Tasks include tea making, transporting scripts and hire gear, taking messages, getting things in place for shoots.

MORE SENIOR PRODUCTION ROLES

Producer – pitches concept to funders (often repeatedly), manages the funding process, controls the spending, does marketing and distribution. Often invented the concept or is already in partnership with the director.

Director – turns the script into an audio-visual on screen. Builds key relationships with actors/performers and/or documentary subjects to convey what is required and achieve strong performances.

1st assistant director – chief communicator/liaison on the set. Manages the schedule to keep the production on track.

Drama writer – roles vary depending on production size. Writers are typically employed as story theme or storyline writers, dialogue writers (usually freelancers) or script editors (making sure storylines and dialogue are consistent).

Promotion director – edits pieces of the production for promotion, supervises voice overs, writes copy for voice overs etc.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

- A driver's licence is essential
- Industry knowledge and understanding
- Screen production knowledge, either in technical areas (editing, camera work, sound recording) or in production organisation and administration
- Ability to work in a team fulfilling a specialist role, but also capable of performing other roles
- Ability to make programmes on the fly and go live, or prepare programmes for organised deadlines
- Technically savvy, with specific skills in Photoshop, audio-editing, creating video

PERSONAL QUALITIES

- All-rounder with common sense
- Good at pitching ideas
- Energetic, shows a lot of initiative
- Tenacious, resilient, able to take knockbacks
- Ability to learn and further develop technical skills while on production
- Excellent communicator across all roles in the industry
- Ability to manage stressful situations and behaviours
- Persuasive and articulate

SALARY GUIDE

Pay rates vary enormously according to production budgets. Rates per day are higher for short jobs such as commercials, and lower for longer contracts. People with significant reputations can earn very large incomes (Peter Jackson, Andrew Adamson), but most incomes are more likely as follows.

	Salary
Director, Director of Photography/Camera Operator, or Production Manager	\$1,000-\$2,000 per week for mainstream television productions \$3,000-\$4,000 per week for experienced people on high-budget jobs
Junior crew member in film/drama productions	Usually minimum wage. Often 50-60 hours a week on a flat rate

Sources: Film Crew Services in Auckland, and Crews Wellington Ltd New Zealand Crew Rates/Directors and Editors Guild NZ

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication and should only be used as a guideline.

THE AUT APPROACH

AUT's Screen Production major sits within the communication studies degree, giving students a unique perspective across the media landscape. As well as screen production, graduates leave with knowledge of media theory, journalism, radio, digital media, advertising and public relations.

There is intensive practical experience from the first year. This includes production or direction of a major project, involving camera, sound recording and editing and multi-camera studio production.

All AUT students develop a press kit and acquire an online account so they can submit to film festivals, put trailers online etc.

FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

Screen production graduates can enter further study at postgraduate certificate and diploma level, then continue into the Master of Communication Studies, and PhD qualifications.

Research topics include: indigenous filmmaking in Aotearoa/NZ, documentary sound theory, animated documentary practice, NZ Pacific identity on screen, personal and social transformation through screen media, ethics in documentary, children's television, representations of mental health in the media, representations of community through screen and transmedia production.



BENJAMIN BROOKING

Freelance video maker/film director

Bachelor of Communication Studies in
TV & Screen Production*

“Making videos as a freelancer means taking on niche projects that large production companies can’t compete for – and thanks to the rise in online video content – there are plenty of small-scale projects to bring to life.

Today was a fairly typical day for me. I woke up early to meet a client for a two-hour shoot on a construction site. Then I went to my office to download footage before going for a run. After lunch at home I met with a new client to discuss a possible project. On the way back to the office I picked up some more video equipment – grabbing a GST receipt to claim the tax back. Finally, I spent the afternoon editing, and fielding emails.

On busy days I may be editing (or filming) well into the night, but when work slows down I can relax and not feel guilty heading out for a skate or watching movies in the middle of the week.

Putting together a video clip for a client typically starts with a meeting to discuss content, style and budget. The clips could be interviews, promotional clips or documentaries.

After the project is greenlit (approved) I organise the details, such as cast, crew and location. Filming can take an hour or a month. Once editing is complete I send the file to my customer or – depending on the relationship – upload finished videos directly to their YouTube channels.

As a freelance director I have more creative control over what I produce, as I am often writer, director, cameraman and editor rolled into one, so I’m more in control but it can be demanding work when all my clients want me at once!

Starting out as a freelancer meant getting my head around business, sales and management. Now I have some experience with working out daily/hourly rates to pay myself I wouldn’t have it any other way. The freedom and flexibility to build work around my life – and not the other way around – has meant I have taken on jobs and opportunities that employed life couldn’t offer.”

USEFUL WEBSITES

Screen Production and Development Association of New Zealand

www.spada.co.nz

Directors & Editors Guild NZ

www.degnz.co.nz/

Film NZ

www.filmnz.com

NZ Film Commission

www.nzfilm.co.nz

Nga Aho Whakaari (Maori in Film, Video and Television)

www.ngaahowhakaari.co.nz

Women in Film and TV NZ

www.wiftnz.org.nz

ScreenNZ

www.screenz.co.nz


FURTHER INFORMATION

For the most up-to-date information on studying screen production and the Bachelor of Communication Studies, visit www.aut.ac.nz/TV-and-Screen

FUTURE STUDENTS

Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: www.aut.ac.nz/enquire


futurestudents@aut.ac.nz

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www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets


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55 Wellesley Street East, Auckland Central

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The information contained in this career sheet is correct at time of printing, September 2020.

