

# Case Study: Actor - John

## What do you do?

I pretty much do bits of anything and everything, really. I work in theatre, TV, adverts and I've done a bit of film work (I recently had a part in The Damned United) - anything that comes my way. As an actor, you get used to taking any job that comes along. It's part of the fun of it.

It's a bit of a double-edged sword though, because you never really know where your next job's coming from. But as long as you see that as an exciting, positive thing, it's quite fun.

I also do temping work between acting jobs.



## What is your background?

I started quite late, compared with a lot of actors. I'd always been interested in drama, but I only really got into it when I was 16 and did a school play.

It went on from there: I joined a youth theatre and we went up to Scotland four years in a row, to do the Edinburgh festival. I also did an A level in performing arts and an AS in dance. It was doing these things that helped me decide that I wanted to go to drama school.

At drama school it's quite intense. You do 45 hours a week, but then you're getting all the training and tuition, and you're introduced to loads of different practitioners - you take from them what's most useful to you. I finished three years ago and came out with a degree in acting.

Drama school is not the 'be all and end all' though; I'd say that half of the people I work with are from a university or college background instead, or they may have grown up in the industry.

Since I've been working, I've learnt much more, because of the variety of work I've done. There's a hell of a lot of learning involved in acting - you're learning all the time.

## What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

As an actor it's best to have as many skills as you possibly can. The more skills you have, the more employable you are. You get called to auditions for the most bizarre things, you really do!

You've got to be physically fit; you need to look after yourself - especially working in touring theatre when you're helping move the equipment! Sports skills can be useful, as you never know what you're going to get asked to do for a part.

Singing and dancing are both useful skills to have and essential if you want to go into musical theatre.

You need to have thick skin. There are a lot of knock-backs and you need to remember not to take things personally. They say that if you get a part from one audition in seven, you're doing very, very well.

You need to be good at working with people, and listening. You also need to be good at picking up on how people work. You can't be an actor and hate people.

There is a sense of responsibility when you're an actor. All art is a snapshot of the time that it was created. It's your responsibility to get that across. You also do a lot of research as an actor, especially when doing something historical.

You need to be able to set goals and keep focussed due to the amount of competition in this industry.

## What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

Teaching is the most obvious one. As an actor, you get very tuned in to how people work. You're always learning and

you develop your own learning styles. And if you're doing 'Theatre in Education', you work with a lot of children too. You get used to variety and being on your feet and being active. Teaching lends itself to that, as every day is different, and you've got all sorts of different activities. Teaching is quite a creative job.

Also telesales, as actors tend to be fairly outgoing and you get used to talking to people you don't know. And marketing as well - and PR (public relations) and HR (human resources) - because of the working with people element.

Promotional work is a mainstay for a lot of actors, because it tends to be short-term contracts. Also, the money can be quite good, and promotional jobs tend to be very people-orientated.

Acting lends itself well to all sorts of different careers, as long as they involve people. As an actor, you need to develop a lot of empathy. So even if you wanted to retrain as something like a therapist or psychologist, I can see close links. You're getting to know people and getting to know - and respect - how they work; understanding their motivations and where they are coming from.

## What changes will there be in the future?

It's an exciting time at the moment, because there's all sorts going on with digital television and the internet. There are a lot of different opportunities.

It should be a good thing, because there should be a lot more opportunities with all the channels that have started up. And the entrepreneurial spirit of all the film companies that are springing up. You have to embrace it.

Everything's opening up a lot more. It's so much cheaper to produce things nowadays. You can get decent camera equipment on the high street.

## What are the biggest challenges in your job?

Uncertainty and lack of stability are the biggest challenges. It's not like a normal job where you know that you're going to have a certain amount of money at the end of the month, and you know you're going to earn a certain amount in a year, so you can apply for a mortgage and all that kind of stuff. You don't have that stability.

It can be quite frightening at times, especially when you see all your friends with mortgages and getting married.

There's also the setback of going to audition after audition and not getting the part; you have to learn to deal with that. But then even the biggest names aren't working all the time.

Also, staying flexible and being willing to do anything are big challenges.

## Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

Acting is incredibly competitive. But then again, anything worth doing which is even remotely enjoyable, is competitive. I firmly believe that if you keep going - if you want it enough and you work hard enough - then you will get there, because you don't give yourself any other choice.

There are opportunities all over the place, but not necessarily in straight acting. There are also behind the scenes roles - you could be a voice coach or a drama teacher, for example.

## What do you like about your job?

I like the variety. You do the most ridiculous things - I've run around in just long johns; fallen over and pretended to break my arm for an advert; dressed up as Ozzy Osbourne. You use your imagination, your body and your voice, and you play - for a living!

You may not be getting the best wages a lot of the time; it may be hard work; but at the end of the day you're not doing something you don't like - you're not living for the weekend. You're doing something you love; you're following your passion.

I think the thing I enjoy the most is the excitement of it - the excitement of creating.

## What do you dislike about your job?

As an actor, it's very difficult to plan. You can't plan holidays with friends three months in advance; you can't be certain about anything. You don't have the safety net of a regular job.

Acting can be an expensive career. You go to auditions, you have photos taken. There's advertising, subscriptions, dance classes, gym, voice classes - everything adds up. It's tough when you don't know when your next acting job is coming along. You've got to look after your finances, and it can be quite tough at times. And I don't like having to fill out self-employment tax forms!

Also, auditions can tend to be short notice - especially for commercials. So if you get a call the night before, you can't book an advance train ticket, which would be cheaper.

## What are your ambitions?

TV and film is what really interests me. It's a very different style of acting to theatre work. In some ways it's a lot more technical, because you've got to 'feel it right now'. In a play, you've got the whole journey and it's laid out in a linear fashion - you know exactly where you're going.

If you're filming - say, for example, an argument - it could be filmed in three different locations (flat, stairwell, car), completely out of sequence, on three different days, depending on what's best for the budget. As an actor, you've got to make that argument logical and follow a pattern so it goes somewhere.

I'd love to do American drama, eventually. It's so well produced, acted and written - that's where I'm heading.

## What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

If you want to do it, do it. Be prepared for a lot of hard work, and to keep going. There may be a lot of setbacks, but if you don't do it, you'll regret it.

Keep on learning - keep an open mind. Learn anything you can, and enjoy learning. Maintain a positive perspective and enjoy the journey of becoming an actor, because it's a long road - but it's great fun.

They say it can take about four years for someone to get established, to start getting known and getting regular work.

Remember how far you've come as well. Keep an eye on where you're going, but don't take for granted how far you've come.

## A day in the life

07:15 am

Arrive at base camp of the film I'm working on, ready for 07:30 call time.

07:30

Go to costume and make-up to be prepared for the day's filming. Have a read though the script to check lines and start getting focused on the task ahead. Also, a trip to the catering van for some breakfast!

8:30 - 09:00

Picked up by a minibus, along with the rest of the cast required on set, and driven to the filming location for a 09.00 start.

09:00 am - 14:00 pm

Briefed on the shooting schedule (which scenes we'll be shooting that day in what order), then it's straight into rehearsals and shooting.

14:00 - 15:00

Picked up in minibus and taken back to base camp for lunch. After lunch we are driven back to the filming location to carry on filming.

15:15 - 19:30

Pick up where the filming left off. Sandwiches are brought onto set for tea, and are eaten between takes.

19:30 - 20:30

The wrap (the end of the day's filming). Driven back to base camp to receive shooting schedule for the next day and then travel back to accommodation.

21:00

Get some dinner. Go through lines and prepare for tomorrow's shooting.